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Walden University
2012

Abstract

The Application of Adult Learning Principles in Effective Preaching

by

Randall C. DeVille

MS, Calvary Theological Seminary, 2005

BA, Calvary Bible College, 1982

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December, 2012

Abstract

Evidence suggests that a disconnect is growing between the information provided in Christian sermons and the life challenges faced by those church attendees. To bridge that divide, the purpose of this study was to better understand the characteristics of a sermon that enhance learning for churchgoers in Christian churches. The guiding question focused on churchgoing adults' perception of the sermon. Additional sub questions explored the relationship of the principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching with churchgoers' and preachers' experiences with sermons. A qualitative case study design included one-on-one interviews with 5 preachers, 5 focus groups with 9 churchgoing adults in each group, and observations of the physical characteristics of 5 worship centers. A constant comparative method was used to identify the key themes. The key themes that emerged were: (a) sermons should be applicable, challenging, and comprehensible and (b) the preacher must be perceived as authentic. The study contributes to positive social change by suggesting a model that preachers can use to improve the qualities and delivery of a sermon to affect listeners' lives in a positive way.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to Rene DeVille and Ellie Nasrallah. Rene, I couldn't ask for a better partner in life. I love you so much. You inspire me to be a better person. You encourage me to be strong when I feel weak. You give me the confidence I need to be my best. You believe in me even when I don't believe in myself. You give me the courage I need to face difficult tasks. You give me words of compassion when I need them even though I don't always admit it! You have help shaped me in to who I am today. I'm everything I am because of your support and love. I am eternally grateful for your love.

Ellie, words do not adequately explain how fortunate I am to be your dad. You are constantly on my mind as I reach for a better tomorrow for our family. I am so proud of the great woman of God you have turned out to be as you love Paul and take care of my beautiful granddaughters, Kylie and Isla. I hope in some small way I am able to give you shoulders for you to stand on that will lift you up to reach new heights all the days of your life. I love you.

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To God my Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ: Without you, none of this would be possible. Your Word brings deliverance, hope, joy, wisdom into my life. I know that nothing that I have or could ever do in my life is worthy of the love and mercy that you have shown me. This educational journey was begun at your direction and is completed for your glory; do with it as you please.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me with all your heart.- Jeremiah 29:11-13

To Dr. Karin Treiber and Dr. Kathleen Lynch: I can never thank you enough for your guidance and support throughout this process. The journey was long and hard and I did not know if I would ever complete it. You both have pushed me further than I thought I could go and taught me so much about the value of inclusiveness. I am sure you sensed my stubbornness but I am glad that you did not give up on me. Your mentoring ways will be remembered with fondness and will shape my mentoring ways in the future. Thank you for sharing your lives with me.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Lecture is the method of choice for higher education course instructors in the United States (Butler, 1992; Omatseye, 2007). Carlson (2001) provided some reasons as to why the lecture method is a popular method of instruction. According to Carlson, any group size can be taught with only one instructor with some degree of effectiveness. The need for few additional instructional materials makes lecture attractive to teacher and administrator alike (Carlson, 2001). Lecture allows the teacher flexibility in influencing the delivery of the material with their style or preferences (Carlson, 2001). There are, however, difficulties with the lecture method that the instructor must overcome. During a lecture, the learner tends to become passive and unmotivated (Carlson, 2001).

The effectiveness of teaching, especially lecture, is not only connected to a teacher's mastery of content but also to their understanding of adult learning concepts and communication. These three characteristics of an effective teacher form what McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey (2002) described as a "three legged stool" where effective communication is as critically important as the other two legs (p. 384). Researchers have examined the role of communication in instruction, focusing on the concepts of immediacy and relevance (Anderson, 1979; Christophel, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1992). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the strategies preachers can employ in an effort to increase effective communication.

I used focus groups, as well as personal interviews, in an attempt to capture the perceived effectiveness of a sermon from the listener's perspective and to gain insight

into what the speaker experiences. It was hoped that the open-ended qualitative questions would provide insight into participants' perceptions associated with teaching as they relate to adult learning principles and communication. I focused on finding out the kind of sermon that delivers a message that changes adults' lives. The perspectives of the churchgoers, along with my observations, provided data to evaluate the preacher's view of elements that comprise effective sermons.

Problem Statement

Preachers in the early 21st century may lack knowledge on the components of sermons that affect their listeners' lives. It is this lack of understanding of how to facilitate adult learning that may explain why churchgoers attend and hear lessons for many years, yet the lessons learned in the sermons are not reflected in their day-to-day lives. Barna (2002) found that only half of church-going adults left church feeling challenged to change. The Barna Group (2002) reported that believers are exposed to many sermons using state of the art technology in a seeker-friendly atmosphere and still are not experiencing any significant change in their personal behavior. Knowles (1984) and Mezirow (1991) argued that learning is indicated by change in behavior; therefore, it appears that churchgoing adults are not learning because their behavior is not changing. This problem of not changing behavior as prompted by church lessons impacts the congregation, minister, and the community at large. The congregation becomes complacent, the minister discouraged, and the community confused when there is no growth or change in the lives of the churchgoers (Knowles, 1984; Morgan, 2002; Strangway, 2004).

There are many possible factors contributing to this problem, among which are attitudes toward adult learning found within the church, moral relativism prevalent in U.S. society, and ministerial training that may lack classes on the educational process and adult learning (Tanner, 1994). Even though Barna (2002) stated that nearly half of churchgoers leave church without being inspired to change, Barna did not explain why church-goers felt uninspired to change their lives based on sermon lessons. Knowles, (1980) Tanner (1994), and Carter (2009) indicated that preachers are often unaware of the educational realities associated with preaching. While teachers of adults need to understand and facilitate adult learning, specific suggestions directly related to preaching are lacking in the literature (Brookfield, 1986; Lai, 1995; Murugiah, 2005). This gap in the literature relates to the practice of preachers in many churches throughout the United States who are not aware of adult learning and communication concepts that could enhance their ability to inspire and educate their listeners. Consequently, I investigated the extent to which preachers use and churchgoers benefit from concepts from adult learning. This study may contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by exploring the experiences and observations of ministers and churchgoing adults as they relate to what they perceive is missing in the preaching process.

Nature of the Study

The case study design used in the qualitative study included one-on-one interviews with pastors. Focus groups made up of church-going adults were also used to inform the study. The study involved participants who fit the description of consistent church-going adults, that is, adults who attend church services on a weekly basis. Pastors

were interviewed to probe their experiences concerning their training, perceptions of the congregants, and their views on the elements that comprise an effective sermon. I focused on the perceptions and experiences of church-going adults at their churches, thus supporting a qualitative research design (Knowles, 1984). The focus groups and personal interviews were conducted face-to-face in an effort to capture a description of the participants' experiences. This strategy was chosen because it offers a focus on the essence of the participants' experiences in connecting to the message of a sermon. Interviews and focus groups, while they are the source of indirect information, also give a description of the participants' experience while giving the researcher an opportunity to probe the historical context of the participant's experience (Creswell, 2009).

I consulted with a panel of experts to develop the interview and focus group questions to address concerns regarding the validity of the interview and focus group planned (Appendix A and B). The findings were analyzed with an understanding that I only addressed techniques in the presentation of content, not the spiritual condition or maturity of the participants. I attempted to identify factors and techniques of preaching that are perceived to make a difference in the effectiveness of the sermon.

The conceptual framework provided a resource in interpreting the findings. Data collection took place by using focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and field notes. Each participant was reminded of the purpose and nature of the study prior to the interview or focus group. The goal was to encourage participants to ask questions regarding procedures quickly but thoroughly before beginning the focus group discussion. The focus groups lasted no longer than 60 minutes. I collected the data with

the help of field notes and audio recording. I did not invite my congregation to participate in the study to avoid bias and undue influence on the participants.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted with a focus on statements made by participants and descriptions of their experiences. The data were analyzed for both the generic and specific processes and were subsequently organized and coded (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) advocated analyzing the data in a way that can yield codes concerning expected subjects, surprising concepts, and concepts that suggest a broader application of the study data.

Research Questions

The overarching question in this study was how do church-going adults perceive the sermon? There were three subquestions for the study:

1. In the experience of churchgoing adults, how do the principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching make a difference in the effectiveness of sermons?
2. What perceptions do preachers have about the effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on the effectiveness of their sermons?
3. How do the views of preachers and churchgoers align on the topic of elements that comprise effective sermons?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to better understand the characteristics of a sermon that enhance learning for church-goers in Christian churches. By exploring the experience of listeners, elements needed to increase the effectiveness of sermons can

be identified. I attempted to discover concepts relating to adult learning or communication that exist in and thus may increase the effectiveness of sermons. In the design, I integrated research on preaching with research on teaching. I considered the resources and research in education and communication theory, seeking to come to a better understanding of the characteristics of effective adult preaching to adult listeners (i.e., lecturing, effective). I used focus groups with church-going adults and personal interviews preachers.

Conceptual Framework

The concepts of adult learning, communication, and ambient teaching are the concepts that guided the study. A more detailed analysis of the concepts is presented in Section 3.

Adult Learning Concepts

Adult learning perspectives are used to explore how adults learn and use what they learn and make meaning. Murugiah (2005) stated that “all levels of learners who engage in the practice of learning have certain unspoken (tacit) beliefs about life and how to apply them in life” (p. 899). Proponents of adult learning perspectives challenge the traditional teacher-centric or “monologue” adult education methods and encourage interaction or “dialogue” between student and teacher (Brookfield, 1990; Knowles, 1984; Vella, 1994). Knowles’s (1984) andragogical principles and two other adult learning concepts were used to develop the issues surrounding the methods or techniques used to teach adults.

Andragogy: Knowles. Knowles (1984) summarized experience and research about the adult learner in the principles of adult learning. Knowles attached the Dutch word *andragogy* to instructional practices to indicate that the learning activities are guided purposefully to produce a change in adult students. The principles of andragogy provide guidelines for adult educators seeking to connect with their students. Knowles suggested the following four guidelines for educators to effectively teach adults: (a) give adults the reason for learning the lesson before the lesson begins, (b) take into account the great and diverse experiences that adults have, (c) realize that adults are ready and excited about learning which will help them deal with real life, and (d) understand that adult learners are primarily intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically (Knowles, 1984).

Transformative learning: Mezirow. Mezirow (1991) viewed adult learning as the teacher encouraging students to be critically reflective of social norms and cultural conduct. The goals of this kind of learning are (a) to help the learner evaluate and understand why they see the world the way they do and (b) to empower the adult learners to discard some of the restrictive perspectives they have held previously. Mezirow challenged adults to reflect on the effects that their perspectives are having on their interaction with other individuals and ideas. Murugiah (2005) described Mezirow's theory this way, "Transformative learning is defined as a process by which we question our taken for granted frames of reference in an effort to make them more integrative, so that they become more justified in guiding our action" (p. 899). The theory describes the

role of adult educators as those who are committed to helping their students become more imaginative and critically reflective of previously held ideas.

Murugiah suggested that certain traits should be considered when approaching adult education. Adult learners have a wealth and variety of life experiences, a desire for problem-centered learning, a capability for self-directed learning, a need for varying presentations according to their learning styles, and a need for continuous learning.

Behavior modification theory: Wertheim. Behavior modification is a theory that is used to understand human behavior and on how people react to certain stimuli. Behavior modification theorists attempt to capitalize on observable outcomes (Wertheim, 2000). Some of the foundational assumptions of this theory are (a) all complex behavior is learned, shaped, and subject to observable laws; (b) a person can change behavior through rewards and punishment; (c) behavior is determined by the environment; and (d) part of what individuals learn results from observing others and the consequences of their actions.

Wertheim (2000) argued that previous assumptions can be applied to learning in the following ways. First, adults learn more rapidly if they are allowed to actively participate in the process, especially when the process includes repetition. Second, feedback, whether positive or negative, aids the student learning and guides their actions. Next, the student who is rewarded needs to know exactly what action is being rewarded so that there is no possibility that any inappropriate or undesirable behavior is reinforced. Finally, nonresponses of a teacher are often misunderstood so student reactions should be monitored (Wertheim, 2000).

Communication. Communication is the process by which thoughts, data, and feelings are shared (Hybels & Weaver, 2007). Some of the earliest researchers who studied the role of communication in instruction were focused on the concepts of immediacy and relevance (Anderson, 1979; Christophel, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1992; McCroskey et al., 2002). The terms immediacy and relevance can be defined as a connection between the one speaking and the one listening.

Immediacy is the verbal and nonverbal things that allow a speaker to connect emotionally with the listener (Olenowski, 2000; Simmons, 2007). The emotional connection can be facilitated verbally or nonverbally. In the emotional bonding theory, Olenowski (2000) focused on the emotions found in the communication process. Olenowski stated that words have emotion and thoughts connected to them, therefore speakers would do well to consider their choice of words and the emotion and thought they communicate. Olenowski explained, “Creating this “common ground” involves imaging, painting and clarifying our interior emotional lives” (p.10). Olenowski advocated the use of metaphor, illustration, humor, storytelling, and self-disclosure to create a common ground between speaker and listener. Nonverbal immediacy has also been shown to affect cognitive learning and to promote favorable outcomes in learners (McCroskey et al., 2002). Learners interpret nonverbal immediacy in an instructor as being caring, understandable, and indicating better instructors than those who are less immediate (McCroskey et al., 2002). Nonverbal immediacy is nonverbal behaviors that communicate approval, fondness, or positive affect to others.

Relevance is described as communication that connects in a practical way with the listener. It is the practice of presenting a lesson in a way that helps the listeners to visualize it as the story of their lives (Daggett, 2005; Furman, 1992; Luntz, 2007; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). Being practical or giving the “how to” after teaching spiritual principles or truths was also suggested as characteristic of adding relevance (Furman, 1992; Luntz, 2007; Strangway, 2004).

Ambient Teaching

Ambient teaching is described as the use of a space and the characteristics and conditions of the space to enhance the oral message and thus support learning. Knowles (1984) observed that the climate for adult learning is impacted by the physical characteristics of the space in which it is to take place. Environmental features are important because they have a direct and powerful impact on learning (Colanduno, 2007; Kennedy, 2002). White (1972) approximated that one fourth of learning is dependent upon the effects of the physical environment. Adult students are more likely than children to be affected by the physical learning environment with an increase in their motivation due to sufficient space, attractive decoration, and functional furnishings (Lane & Lewis, 1971). Ambient teaching is not just the way a speaker uses the space but it is the way the space is perceived, felt, and reacted to by the learner. There are four areas of concern that are elements in evaluating adult learning environments (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990).

Anthropometry means the dimensions of the human body (Colanduno, 2007). Adults are found in different shapes and sizes. These dimensions are important to consider when designing learning spaces (Colanduno, 2007). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) posited that the

choice of chairs, their size, padding, shape, and arrangement are areas of concern.

Another concern is *ergonomics* which deals with bringing comfort to those who occupy a space or use an instrument (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). The size and shape of the classroom influence the philosophy or expectation that a teacher may have for the instruction within that space (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Kennedy, 2002). *Proxemics* includes gestures, touch or avoidance of touch, eye behavior, and posture (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Teachers who are sensitive to these student dynamics are better prepared to connect with a diverse student body.

Sociofugal and *sociopetal* are two different kinds of settings that affect the use of that space for adult learners. Sociofugal settings are used in environments where interaction among the students is discouraged and attention is primarily forward towards the lecturer. This arrangement creates a status distinction where students see themselves as nonspecial and having no distinct identity compared with the instructor (Colanuno, 2007; White, 1972). Sociopetal settings are environments which encourage interaction and can facilitate conversation by having the learners seated facing towards one another (Colanuno, 2007; Fulton, 1991). *Synaesthetics* involves the study of how students are affected by the simultaneous use of several of their senses. Comfort concerns can be noted in temperature and humidity levels as well as in the availability of suitable chairs, bathrooms, and refreshments (Vosko, 1991). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) and Knowles (1980) indicated that much more research needs to be done on the relationships between the human senses such as touch, smell, and taste the outcomes adult learners experience in an adult learning environment. Colanduno (2007) investigated learning space design

and its effect upon academic success. Colanduno demonstrated that students' attitudes towards learning were directly influenced by the design of the learning spaces. It is important for teachers to understand how the physical learning environment impacts the students' senses in ways that enhance student participation and productivity (White, 1972). Hiemstra and Sisco suggested that the physical environment “enhances learner commitment” (p. 246). Since environmental features have an impact on learning, preachers can use the space and characteristics of the space in which they preach to enhance their sermons and thus support learning.

The frameworks of adult learning, communication, and ambient teaching guided the approach, design, and interpretation of data for the study in the following ways. The adult learning concept of self-direction influenced the qualitative design using focus groups and guided the choice of questions that were to be used. Communication concepts were integrated into an instrument that I designed for the observations of preacher participants in the study. The concepts of ambient teaching concerning the characteristics and conditions that support the learning environment were used to guide the development of an instrument to assess the physical learning environments found in the churches involved in the study.

Operational Definitions

Ambient teaching: The use of the space and the characteristics and conditions of the space that enhance the message of the oral communication and support adult learning (Lynch, 2010).

Andragogy: “An organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capacity to function as self-directed learners” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 199).

Communication: The process by which thoughts, data, and feelings are shared by people (Hybels & Weaver, 2007).

Effectiveness: The measure by which the teacher nurtures perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

Immediacy: The verbal and nonverbal things “that allow a speaker to bond emotionally with the listener” (Olenowski, 2000, p. 11).

Preaching: The passionate explanation of the message of the Bible in practical terms for personal use (Furman, 1992).

Relevance: The quality of a lesson that describes whether or not the teacher connects the lesson to be learned with the real life situations of the students (Brookfield, 1990; Robles, 1998).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

Assumptions

1. The questions used in this study accurately captured the concepts necessary for understanding if effectiveness was achieved in the preaching identified.
2. Participants were candid and truthful in their responses.
3. The concepts of comprehension and challenge to change are terms that can be used to describe the effectiveness in sermons.

4. A sermon can change an adult listener's behavior for the better.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the following five points: First, the study was limited to a group of five preachers and nine of each of their listeners. Only consistent church-going adults and a small group of preachers were the focus for the study. Next, the meaning of effective was limited to the quality of a lesson which describes how well it is comprehended and whether it challenges the listener to change. I examined only the factors that contributed to meaningful communication and predictable reaction. Third, the focus groups, interviews, and observations provided the sole data for the research. Some participants may not have been able to adequately verbalize their experience if the questions did not connect to their particular background and experience. Fourth, I only addressed techniques while not considering spiritual condition or maturity in the participants. The participants brought much more to the study than what was probed, leaving some contributing factors neglected. The fifth limitation in this study was the research design. I focused on the subjective and interpretive experiences of participants. The purposeful discovery of the subjective experiences of participants means the findings could be subject to other interpretations.

Delimitations

There were three delimitations for the study. The number of respondents was 45 adult church-goers in five geographically distinct areas. In addition, five pastors representing several denominations were interviewed for a total of 45 respondents for the study. The scope of the study was narrowed by interviewing and observing only the five

churches from five different denominations. A second delimitation was the limited amount of time spent in the interview and focus group process. The limited number of locations constituted the third delimitation. I observed only one worship service at each church. It was further delimited by restricting the time of interviews and focus groups to only 60 minutes.

Significance of the Study

Barna (2002) reported that only half of sermons delivered in churches were effective in challenging churchgoers to change. This study was significant for two reasons: (a) I filled a gap in the scholarly literature on effective preaching by determining the elements of adult learning practice and principles that constitute an effective sermon, and (b) positive social change may be achievable as a result of this study. Church-goers might have their values challenged in educational opportunities where equality, justice, democracy, and freedom are critically discussed along with consistency in living according to these principles.

Knowledge Generation

Updated research on effective preaching may give preachers a better understanding of the dynamics involved in educating, motivating, and transforming the thinking of others so as to affect change in their lives. Preachers may discover that there is a need for change in their sermon preparation and delivery (Knowles, 1980). Preachers can draw upon seminaries, seminars, and professional publications to support and inform curriculum that can be used to educate aspiring religious communicators. Hopefully, it will encourage them to embrace that truth by itself may not always persuade and that

preachers are called to be more than “mere pulpit disc jockeys playing God’s records” (Morgan, 2002, p. 4).

Social Change

The beneficiaries of the study are those who find themselves in places of worship where effective preaching is practiced. It is also hoped that church-goers will no longer simply attend religious services and receive a spiritual buzz, but have their values challenged and evaluated to assess their consistency in living according to them (Knowles, 1984). It is also hoped that the church-goers in congregations where effective preaching is practiced will be challenged by participation in educational opportunities where equality, justice, democracy, and freedom are critically discussed (Mezirow, 1991). The results of this study may be a resource other congregants can use for choosing a church or teacher that will meet their needs most (Knowles, 1980).

I assumed that if speakers understand the key elements and practices that make up effective sermons, they may change the way they lecture and potentially stimulate a life change in their listeners (Mezirow, 1991). While I focused on a religious or faith-based topic, the emphasis was on the skills and characteristics that can be employed in order to achieve desired results in lecture as well as preaching (Brookfield, 1987; Merriam, 1991).

Summary

In Section 1, I introduced the research problem which focuses on the experience of church-going adults while listening to a preacher’s sermons. The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of listeners of sermons in an attempt to discover concepts relating to adult learning or communication that exist in and thus may increase the

effectiveness of sermons. The theoretical and conceptual framework that guided the study were drawn from the adult learning perspectives of Knowles (1980), Mezirow (1991), and Wertheim (2000). In Section 2 the literature review is presented as a means to support the research purpose, methodology, and questions. The section also includes an analysis of the literature related to the methodology for this study. The review of literature provides an analysis of adult learning concepts as well as an exploration into the role of relevancy and immediacy in aiding the listener to gain a deeper level of meaning (Daggett, 2005; Luntz, 2007; Mezirow, 1991). In Section 3, I present the justification for the study using a qualitative design. I also present details concerning the population, how the interviews were administered, and the data analysis. The findings are presented by themes and subthemes in Section 4 and the interpretation of the findings as well as conclusions and recommendations are found in Section 5.

Section 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this study, research on adult learning concepts was incorporated with research on communication techniques, especially as they relate to lecture and preaching, and with research on ambient teaching. In the first three divisions of the review, I focused on adult learning and its nature, needs, and nurture. In the fourth section, I concentrated on elements of communication with a focus on relevancy, immediacy, and authenticity. I also focused on physical environmental features that have an impact on adult learning.

I accessed the Trimble, Winterset public, Kraemer family, St. Charles City-County, and the Walden University libraries to obtain sources for this literature review. Databases consulted included ERIC, Medline, ProQuest, and EBSCO. I searched for peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and books written in the last 5 years. The search terms used in the literature review included *andragogy*, *adult learning*, *adult religious education*, *church education*, *adult teaching*, *communication*, *immediacy*, *relevance*, *lecture*, *preaching*, *ambient teaching*, *ambient learning*, *physical learning environment*, and *transformation*.

Adult Learning

Brief History of Adult Education

The formation of adult education in the United States is different than from other places in the world. It has developed without defined goals, institutional forms, distinctive curriculum and methodology, or agreed upon goals (Knowles, 1962). Until

the middle of the 20th century, there was no agreement as to the components or goals of adult education or even whether or not it was a movement (Knowles, 1962). Only within the past 50 years has a theoretical framework emerged that separates adult learning from children's learning (Knowles, 1984). According to Knowles (1962), the one institution that was most influential for the first 2 centuries of the United States' national life was the church. The church continues to be involved with adult education into the early part of the 21st century but has not integrated adult education philosophy and techniques (Knowles, 1962). Before 1861, three other institutions formed the basis for the adult education movement in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The three institutions were the Lowell Institute and Cooper Union, the library, and the museum (Knowles, 1962).

Lai (1995) suggested that adult education in U.S. churches generally include a teacher-centered or lecture approach and incorporates the Biblical mandate to use preaching as the means to instruct churchgoers. Knowles (1962) argued that while the church has made an impact on adult education in the United States during the first 2 centuries of its history, the church has not integrated adult education philosophy and techniques into its work of preaching. McKenzie and Harton (2002) posited that there was still some resistance to adoption of adult learning principles in adult religious education due to what they suggested was a reliance on theology over methodology. While religious educators emphasized "the application of theology to life results in religious learning" (McKenzie & Harton, 2002, p. 2), adult learning theorists have advocated transformative learning whereby the teacher becomes a facilitator for student-

centered dialogue that stimulates critical thinking, leading to changes in behavior (Brookfield, 1987; Houde, 2006; Lai, 1995; Mezirow, 1991).

Lecture

Lecture was the method of choice for higher education course instructors in the United States in the 20th century (Butler, 1992). Carlson (2001) reported that any group size can be taught with only one instructor with some degree of effectiveness. The need for few additional instructional materials makes lecture attractive to both the teacher and the administrator. The lecture method allows the teacher flexibility in influencing the delivery of the material with their style or preferences (Carlson, 2001). However, there are difficulties with the lecture method. During a lecture, the learner tends to become passive and unmotivated. Lai (1995) described lecture as oppressive because it extinguishes self-directedness and implicitly teaches listeners to be passive and dependent on the teacher. Lecturers often seem unaffected by the boredom they inflict on their listeners (Brookfield, 1990). Teachers struggle with the practical aspects of how to make their lectures critically stimulating.

The length of the lecture has a great deal to do with its effectiveness (Oermann, 2004). Carlson (2001) stipulated the optimal length of a lecture as between 20 and 30 minutes. Carlson suggested the use of a well-organized outline with a clear-cut introduction and conclusion and some form of visual enhancement to enhance student learning. Brookfield (1990) suggested several ways to improve lecture. The lecturer needs to know the audience, their interests, roles, and dilemmas. The asking of information-gathering questions can engage the audience and help the speaker by

providing valuable feedback (Kraus & Sears, 2008; Oermann, 2004). Brookfield stated that the lecturer that takes an inquiry stance, especially at the beginning and the end of the lecture, encourages the listeners to investigate the big issues. Brookfield also suggested that the lecturer should speak from skeleton notes and not from prewritten scripts which can be perceived as boring and predictable. Brookfield preferred the use of notes because notes “create [the] appearance of being spontaneous, allow for idiomatic language, and require thorough knowledge of subject” (p. 79). Brookfield also suggested using visual aids to connect the main points in the lecture. Researchers have indicated value in the lecturer illustrating ideas by using analogies and metaphors as well as anecdotes from his or her life, pop culture, sports, or current events (Brookfield, 1990; Butler, 1992; Carlson, 2001; Chesebro, 2003; Kraus & Sears, 2008). Krause and Sears (2008) found lectures from teachers who are approachable, caring, creative, open-minded, realistic, fair, and respectful most effective. Krause and Sears further noted that teaching that included things that were interesting and involved students actively through discussion, labs, and projects held the students’ attention and aided in the students’ retention of the material.

Butler (1992) presented the findings from a research study conducted with freshman and sophomore students taking human biology courses at Dorset House School of Occupational Therapy. The study was designed to evaluate perceived effectiveness of different teaching methods that can be incorporated into a basic lecture format. The 126 student participants were divided into the two groups taught by the same professor. Five different ways of using the 50 minutes of class time were tried. The five methods were

worksheets, didactic or traditional lecture, uncompleted handout, completed handout, and the use of experimental tasks. The students were given evaluation sheets and asked to rank each method from one to 10, where one was least effective and 10 was most effective. Butler confirmed that traditional didactic lecture was the least effective method. The best method was the use of handouts, whether completed or uncompleted. Students added that the handouts helped them know where the lesson was going and what would be expected of them. The students especially appreciated the clearly stated objectives that served as study guides for reading and tests. The modified lecture with notes and handouts were shown to increase subject relevance while making the lecture more exciting, provoking, inspiring, and effective (Butler, 1992).

Definition of Adult Education

The term adult education has been used with three intended meanings. One meaning is to describe the process of continued learning after formal schooling has been completed (Knowles, 1962). Adult education can also be defined as a movement, classification, or field (Knowles, 1962). Adult education can also refer to a set of educational exercises that institutions design for adult men and women for the reaching of certain educational objectives (Merriam, 1991). It is this last definition for adult education that is the focus of this literature review.

Andragogy

Andragogy is a system of intentional strategies aimed at creating an environment that encourages adult learners to participate in transformational learning (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1991; Vella, 1994). Andragogy is not an idea that competes with pedagogy but

is at the opposite end of the same spectrum. Pedagogical strategies are applicable in applications where the andragogical model is not (Knowles, 1980). The andragogical model comes with certain assumptions. Four of the assumptions are that the adult learner has (a) self-direction or autonomy; (b) more experience triggers to learning than youth; (c) a task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning; and (d) action or some other way of indicating learning has happened (Knowles, 1984; Merriam, 1991). The importance of dialogue is one of the basic assumptions in adult learning (Shor & Freire, 1987; Vella, 1994). Vella (1994) explained that adult educators have to have confidence in the adult learner because they have enough life experience and can learn new knowledge they deem helpful.

Adult Religious Education

During the period from 1920 to 1960, adult religious education developed as a subfield in adult education (Elias, 1993). Religious organizations were slower than other bodies to expand their adult education programs. Rapid growth of such programs after 1960 is credited to church leaders' response to declines in the frequency of religious activity amongst church members (Foltz, 1990). During 1980 to 1990, there was an increase in theory and research concerning adult learning with virtually no research focusing exclusively on adult religious learning. Many Protestant churches had begun expanding their adult religious education programs leading to the hiring of directors of adult education (Elias, 1993).

According to Foltz (1986), adult religious education needed was a reconceptualization of its purposes and scope. Foltz called for a reconceptualization

“based not only on theological perspectives but also on principles of adult education, an understanding of educational anthropology and contextual metalanguage, research information regarding adult development, and on the principles of marketing” (p. 21).

This call for learning the teacher’s art is also a call for the Christian minister to develop and keep alive a scholarly approach to his or her profession (Palmer, 1937). Adult religious education needs to develop professionals who will integrate theory and practice, acknowledging the need for not only the professional but also for the practitioner to ensure future progress (Foltz, 1986).

The purpose of adult religious education is to challenge an individual or culture’s ideals, feelings, and living (Vogel, 1984). Most of the laity assumes that the Christian faith should make a difference in the way an individual lives (Foltz, 1990). Palmer (1932) stated that adult religious education makes a Christian character or “efficient Christian personality” (p. 35). Education in the church, Palmer posited, is not just a department or special service but it is the work of the church itself. Vogel (1984) described the function of Christian religious education as that which affirms the worth of every individual and their power to make responsible decisions. Vogel further described religious education as witnessing to the acts of God in history, thereby urging individuals to reflect critically on what they have seen and heard.

One of the challenges of adult religious education is that the church in the United States exists in a pluralistic society and a constantly evolving world. The institutions of family, church, and school have seen their importance wane while persons have experienced growing flexibility and personalized life choices (Vogel, 1984). Another

obstacle to religious learning is seen in the increasing trend towards secularism, rationalism, relativism, plurality, and individualism (Elias, 1993). Given this background, it is appropriate to consider the goals of adult education.

Goal of Adult Education

The goal of adult education and adult education activities is to provide for the multifaceted growth of each participant. In Knowles's (1980) view, the purpose of education is to produce competent people who can apply what they learn to life's ever-changing situations. The focus is not simply on learning, as Carter (2009) suggested, but on transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991). The development of adult education will lead to better conditions of individuals and throughout society (Knowles, 1962). The change that adult education can effect occurs when participants enter into critical discourse on subjects relevant to them that are reflective of social norms and cultural codes (Mezirow, 1991). Adult educators have a responsibility to create opportunities for learners to become more critically reflective. The goal of andragogy in Mezirow's (1991) view is to develop critically reflective and self-directed learning adults. Some of the values that adults must wrestle with include freedom, democracy, equality, justice, and social cooperation. Through critical thinking, adults can be better equipped to expand their way of looking at and behaving in their world (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991; Vella, 1994).

Needs for Adult Learning

Adult learners are avid learners who are motivated by different things in which they place value. Whether it is for vocation or vacation, realization or acquisition, adults

are motivated learners (Merriam, 1991). Adult learners are self-directed and ready to learn what is needed in order to function more competently in some area of their lives (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). The role of the adult educator is one of many that provide needed support for the learner. Knowles (1980) listed the functions of the teacher of adults as diagnostic, planning, motivational, methodological, resource, and evaluative (p. 26). The diagnostic function is seen as helping the learner focus on the needs for particular learning activities. Sequencing of the learning experiences by teachers is considered a planning function. Teachers who create conditions that are conducive to learning perform a motivational function (Knowles, 1980). When teachers make decisions and selections concerning teaching techniques and methods, they are engaging in a methodological function. The resource function is illustrated by a teacher providing human and material resources needed for the learning activity (Mezirow, 1991). Teachers of adults perform the evaluative function as they help the learner measure the outcomes of their educational experience (Knowles, 1980).

In an educational program designed for adults, the curriculum is developed around the interests and needs of the student. The adult learner has a wealth of experience which will serve as a living text (Jackson, 2009). This same experience fosters greater differences in the adult student (Knowles, 1984). Consequently, the task of adult educators is to assist the learner in evaluating and analyzing critically their values, beliefs, and conduct as each has developed in the context of their lived experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) described this task as assisting adult learners through several phases of transformation. The first phase is a disorienting dilemma wherein the

learner's previously held belief comes into conflict with a newly identified value, leading to a sort of unrest or disequilibrium. Several phases lead through the transformation of feelings, values, relationships, and finally result in action. The final phase of the transformational learning process is theorized as occurring when the learner has built competence and confidence in their new skills. The transformed adult learner has acquired knowledge that he or she can reintegrate into life with different conditions dictated by a new perspective (Mezirow, 1991). The use of Mezirow's phases of transformation informed this study and the research questions by exploring how a sermon might create a disorienting situation for the listener. The preacher might understand and use the impact of core elements of a transformative approach to teaching. The list of elements the preacher might incorporate in a sermon includes individual experience, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and an authentic practice (Mezirow et al., 2009).

The use of critical incident exercises, criteria analysis, and crisis-decision simulations are three ways Brookfield (1987) suggested to prompt adult students to examine their assumptions. Critical incident exercises are used to ask students to identify some event that held particular significance to them, particularly their greatest personal satisfaction. Criteria analysis is an exercise that helps students identify and make explicit the standards and values they use in determining whether an activity is good or profitable. Crisis-decision simulations get students to imagine themselves in situation where they must choose from a number of unsettling choices (Brookfield, 1987).

The Nurture of Adult Learning

The Climate for Adult Learning

Adult educators have come to realize that they should focus on facilitating learning by creating an environment that is conducive to learning (Brookfield, 1990; Knowles, 1984; Merriam, 1991; Vella, 1994). Merriam (1991) listed people, structure, and culture as three organizational factors that can encourage learning. Knowles (1984) argued that the teachers can set a psychological climate that influences the adult learner. Knowles prescribed a climate of “mutual respect, collaborativeness, mutual trust, supportiveness, pleasure, humanness, openness and authenticity” (p. 15). An environment that optimizes learning is described as one that features utilitarianism, attractiveness, comfort, and flexibility (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Knowles posited that even the arranging of chairs and the lectern is important because the arrangement reveals the mindset of the instructor.

The Adult Teacher

Brookfield (1990) described an adult educator as someone who has a personal vision of teaching that reflects on whether or not they are helping their students learn in the context that they find themselves working. The educator will continually evaluate his or her methods and techniques in order to sharpen his or her skills in cultivating learning.

Kersson-Griep (2001) studied teacher communication competence and its effect on student motivation in a university setting. Kersson-Griep concluded that teachers who are schooling students for democracy can significantly improve their results by

employing adroit *face-support*. Face-support refers to the way students interpret how teachers communicate with them. Three related concepts that Condon (2008) connected to teacher communication competence described a student's feeling of being misunderstood as feeling unheard, ignored, and/or misinterpreted. Three face-needs of adult students that Kersson-Griep highlighted were described as autonomy, belonging, and competence. Autonomy is communicated when an instructor gives students a choice or an opportunity to be self-directed as the notion of andragogy explains. Belonging refers to the student's need for fellowship or camaraderie. The student needs assurance that he or she is accepted and fits in the group. The face-need of competence describes the student's need to believe that he can learn as well as believe that the instructor believes she has what it takes to master the material. The student's need for a feeling of competence runs counter to the student feeling that the teacher is demeaning or talking down to him or her (Kersson-Griep, 2001).

Trust is a significant factor in whether or not students will experience significant learning from their teacher (Brookfield, 1990). Brookfield stated that "the more profound and meaningful the learning [will be] to the students, the more they need to be able to trust their teachers" (1990, p. 163). Brookfield perceived two components for trustworthiness—credibility and authenticity. Credibility is the component that is comprised of the teacher's knowledge, skill and expertise--in a word, their competence. Authenticity, the other component of trustworthiness, when perceived by students comprises the teacher's character with his or her passions, frailties, and emotions. Authenticity reflects on the teacher's personhood and whether he or she is able to admit

to errors and fallibility while being consistent in words and actions. Brookfield instructed teachers seeking to build trust to: “be explicit about your organizing vision, be ready to admit your errors, reveal yourself unrelated to teaching, demonstrate that you take students’ concerns seriously, realize the power of role modeling, don’t play favorites, and don’t deny your credibility” (p. 165). In Brookfield’s view, trust in the teacher is built up over time as the teacher is given opportunities to reveal competence and authenticity. The nurture of adult learning is enhanced by the three organizational factors of people, structure, and culture. The adult teacher who leads students to significant learning is one who is trusted. A teacher’s perceived credibility and authenticity lead students to trust them.

Preachers as Adult Teachers

Some ministers fail to realize that they are in a role of an adult educator (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1980) contended that large meetings such as church preaching services as they are generally conducted do not produce much learning. Knowles stated that the educative quality of any such meeting is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of the interaction during the meeting. The three loci of fields of where interaction can be stimulated are the audience, the platform, and the interplay between the audience and the platform (Knowles, 1980). Lai (1995) agreed with Knowles that a new model for Christian adult education is needed in churches where the principles of andragogy are considered. Lai argued that approaches where theology is taught through a teacher-centered lecture need to give way to a model that encourages dialogue with listeners in order to produce individuals that are “biblically literate, critically

conscious, and actively involved Christians” (p. 2). Lai listed two reasons why it is time for a change in the way the Bible is taught in churches. Lai first reason was that the printed Bible is now available to the people in the pew and they have become enabled independent learners. Lai’s second reason related to his view of the changes in the church and society through the expansion in information availability that has left the church and its antiquated educational modalities less functional.

Communication

While there are many different qualities that are given for effective teaching and preaching, two that appear frequently on researchers’ lists are the qualities of immediacy and relevance (Furman, 1992; McCroskey, et al, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004; Warren, 2007). In the following division of the literature review the literature on the topic of communication with a focus on relevancy and immediacy in preaching will be synthesized. Relevancy in communication is understood by connection, character, and context. The literature on the topics of verbal and non-verbal forms of immediacy and their impact on the learning process are also synthesized.

Relevance

The concept of relevance seems to encompass much more than a teacher or preacher contextualizing the subject matter in a contemporary setting. Strangway (2004) explained relevancy in preaching as tying the message into the concerns, hopes, and dreams of the listeners. In Strangway’s view, the perception of being relevant is the work that the teacher does in order to connect with the listener.

In the literature reviewed for this study, not only was agreement found on the influence of relevance on the effectiveness of preaching, but there was agreement as to what constitutes relevance (Butler, 1992; Furman, 1992; Lai, 1995; Morgan, 2002; Strangway, 2004; Warren, 2007). Preaching that is relevant is consistently presented as communication that helps the learner connect to the lesson (Luntz, 2007; Strangway, 2004). There are several ways the preacher can encourage this connection. One method is the presentation of the lesson in a way that helps the listeners to visualize it as the story of their lives (Furman, 1992; Daggett, 2005; Luntz, 2007; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). Being practical or giving the “how to” after teaching spiritual principles or truths was also suggested as characteristic of adding relevance (Furman, 1992; Luntz, 2007; Strangway, 2004). A third characteristic presented in the literature reviewed for this study focused more on the character of the speaker than on a technique. The integrity and good character of the preacher were stated as important elements in promoting relevancy (Furman, 1992; Morgan, 2002; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). One other descriptor of relevance discussed was the teacher giving a clear overview of the lesson ahead and how it would connect to what had already been learned or presented (Butler, 1992; Furman, 1992; Daggett, 2005).

Luntz (2007) stressed the need for communicators to make their presentations relevant. Luntz stated that the speaker needs to “take the imaginative leap of stuffing yourself right into your listener’s shoes to know what they are thinking and feeling in the deepest recesses of their mind and heart” (p. xiii). While the notion of relevance lends itself to speaker creativity, it is also practical in nature. Relevance in teaching can be

gained by using instructional strategies that help students connect with the material. A teacher who tells the class what to expect in the next chapter and how it compares or contrasts to what they are currently learning, improves the instruction and adds relevance to the lesson (Marzano, 2003). Robles (1998) built on this notion by listing the relevance terms that describe important concepts which connect the student with the lesson. Robles delineated the concepts of experience, present worth, future usefulness, needs matching, modeling, and choice. A broader description of relevance included the context of the speaker's character (Morgan, 2002; Warren, 2007). Warren specified humility, integrity, generosity, civility, and clarity as attributes that are needed to engage the listener (2002).

Furman (1992) scrutinized baby boomers, those U.S. citizens born between 1946 and 1964, and their unique characteristics that influence how they receive spiritual truth. Furman interviewed ministers contemporary Furman's time, reviewed previous research, and drew conclusions concerning what constitutes effective preaching to baby boomers. Furman's analysis of the findings indicated that young to middle age adults choose a church based on the meaningful content of sermons. The conclusion of Furman's research was that effective preaching could be described in the terms biblical, personal, and practical. While Furman did not use the word *relevance*, the meaning and spirit of relevance was found in all three points of Furman's conclusion. Biblical was defined as preaching that is only effective when it "introduces and explains characters, background, and doctrines in contemporary terms" (Furman, 1992, p. 165). Personal preaching was described as preaching that emphasizes how the story of the sermon can be understood and visualized as the story of the listeners' lives. Furthermore, practicality in the message

was embodied in the concept of relevance. The conclusion of Furman's study was that preaching is most effective when it tells the listeners "how to" live, do, or be in light of revelation given (Furman, 1992).

Strangway (2004) conducted research in order to better understand how to preach effectively in a postmodern context. Strangway termed effective preaching that which is "incarnational" (p. 4) meaning it is based on the view that the message presented is delivered to a specific group of listeners in a specific context. Strangway listed 10 qualities of effective preaching, one of which states that the goal of preaching is relevance. For Strangway, the ideas of the audience listening taking the message seriously, interacting with the message, and considering the claims and promises is directly related to its relevance. Strangway connected relevancy to authenticity and to life. Strangway's findings indicated that relevancy is composed of two elements. First, whatever is preached must be shown to be pertinent to a person's life. The message presented needs to address needs, concerns, and questions that the individual is already contemplating. The second element of relevancy is the need for whatever is taught to hold value. Relevance in the sermon must be connected to how this important message can make a difference in the listener's life.

Strangway (2004) declared that relevance affects the preacher's view of application and impact. The effective preacher is one who is a student of culture and is aware of the macro and micro concerns of the people. The application of the sermon is a time for connecting the message to the issues, events, and concerns that confront the listeners. Thus, preachers should list some micro issues as family, marriage, sin, and

spirituality and include macro issues such as world peace, terrorism, employment, and social concerns in their sermons. The preacher is person who can bridge the gap between deep spiritual truth and the need for practical everyday wisdom while communicating a compassion for and interest in the listeners' daily struggles. Relevancy in this context has an effect because the speaker creates a dialogue with the listener by using stories, questions, and objects. An effective preacher not only speaks about the things that are commonplace but also the matters of the heart (Strangway, 2004).

Daggett (2005) developed a framework for planning and instruction that was designed to assist teacher practitioners with rigorous and relevant instruction (Appendix A). The idea was to help teachers and the developers of teachers take a deeper look into how they were planning their curriculum and teaching. This framework was centered around a taxonomy of knowledge which was based on Bloom's taxonomy (Forehand, 2005), and Daggett's action continuum application model. The rigor/relevance framework (Daggett, 2005) has four quadrants that are labeled from A to D, and to each is assigned a level--acquisition, application, assimilation, or adaptation respectively. Each of these levels represents a different type of knowledge and a higher level of understanding. When the instructor uses the lecture approach, he or she only supports learning in the A and C quadrants (Daggett, 2005). Quadrants B and D are the quadrants of application and adaptation which correspond closely to life-changing types of education. To enhance student learning, Daggett challenged teachers to change their focus of instruction. Daggett stated that deeper level meaning can be attained if the teacher takes into consideration students' interests, facilitates students' active

construction of meaning, uses questioning and feedback to stimulate student reflection, and uses a variety of resources to promote understanding.

In Luntz' presentation on context and relevance, Luntz (2007) explained and illustrated Luntz' notion of what is critical for anyone who wants their message to be understood and cause the listener to act. Luntz presented context for the "why" of the message so that the listener will be ready for the "therefore." In Luntz' view, the value of the message lies in its relevance to the context. Relevance is the complement to context and is focused on the individual and the personal meaning of the message. Luntz (2007) challenged speakers to shed their own perspective in favor of seeing the environment through the listeners' eyes.

Relevance and context are needed for successful sermon delivery. Warren (2007) stated that if a person is not worried about staying true to the biblical message, relevance is easy. Warren also stated that if teachers are narrowly focused on making sure they remain biblical in their teaching, they might easily abandoning relevance. Warren's response to this dilemma was to consider relevancy not as a strategy but as a lifestyle (Warren, 2007).

Immediacy

Immediacy is the manner in which the teacher stimulates the student to have affect for the content and for the teacher. Immediacy is described in terms of being verbal or nonverbal. The action of the speaker may include speaking in a way that communicates the speaker's emotional bond with the listener (Olenowski, 2000). This emotional bond is one outcome that Simmons (2007) noted in reporting the outcome of

adult learning experiment. Simmons stated that the building of community and relationships in the class Simmons studied aided students in their retention of information. This outcome can also be supported by the speaker using proximity to the listeners and purposeful expression.

Morgan (2002) argued that preachers have a responsibility to connect with their audience through an inspiring transmission. The problem, according to Morgan (2002), is linked to the minister's habit of reading, competence in language, passion, emotional affectation, and/or ethical persuasion. Morgan's solution or prescription for curing a lack of relevance in preaching is for preachers "to fortify themselves with competence in language, involve not only the mind but also the emotions of the hearers, and be respectable both morally and intellectually" (p. 4). The facility with language, Morgan said, has a predictive ability as to whether a speaker will have the ability to persuade effectively. Learning rarely happens in an emotional vacuum (Brookfield, 1990; Olenowski, 2000). Language is also at the center of the need for the speaker to touch the emotions of the listener. Knowing the mind and feelings of those being taught allows the preachers to identify with the ones they wish to influence. Morgan contended, "in every era when memorable sermons flourish, dynamic preachers implement passionate persuasion" (p. 3). Truth by itself will not always persuade, Morgan argued. Preachers are called to be more than "mere pulpit disc jockeys playing God's records" (p. 4). She stressed that impassioned persuasion makes a tremendous difference in whether or not preaching is effective or not (Morgan, 2002).

Preachers need to speak in such a way as to bond emotionally with their listeners. The emotional bonding theory declares “there exists a group of skills that together can allow for verbal and nonverbal communication between the speaker and the listener or create an emotional bond” (Olenowski, 2000, p. 11). This facility with language is said to have a predictive ability as to whether a speaker will have the ability to persuade effectively. Language is also at the center of the need for the speaker to touch the emotions of the listener. Knowing the mind and feelings of those being taught allows the preacher to identify with the ones he or she wishes to influence. The reality of the need for emotion in persuasive speaking is emphasized in the statement, “in every era when memorable sermons flourish, dynamic preachers implement passionate persuasion” (Morgan, 2002, p. 3). Luntz (2007) presented 10 rules of effective language: (a) simplicity, (b) brevity, (c) credibility, (d) consistency, (e) novelty, (f) sound and texture, (g) aspirational speech, (h) visualization, (i) asking a question, and (j) providing context and explain relevance. Luntz demonstrated the connection between immediacy and relevance in his discussion of what people really care about, and 21 words and phrases that connect emotionally with listeners. Luntz (2007) argued, “It’s not what you say, it’s what people hear” (p. xiii). Luntz posited that no matter how good the message or lesson is, it will only be understood through the prism of someone’s emotions, ideas, experiences, and presuppositions. Vella (1994) echoed the need for the learning task to contain an element of actions, ideas, and feelings.

Olenowski’s (2000) research on the emotional bonding theory and effective preaching, stated “thirty-seven percent of homilies didn’t have any of the applications of

the teaching presented” (p. 9). Olenowski argued that this lack of application results in a certain coldness where emotions of the spirit are missing. The emotional bonding theory is promoted as the answer to bridging the gap and finding common ground of shared experience between the minister and the congregation. Olenowski’s approach is one that encourages the speaker to identify with the listeners in such a way as to help the listeners to perceive that they are “in the same boat” with the speaker. The emotional bonding theory focused the spotlight on the emotions found in the preaching process. Emotion is referred to as a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and the range of propensities to act. Olenowski stated that emotions are what attract individuals to certain people, objects, actions, and ideas, while moving people away from others. Words have emotion and thoughts connected to them, therefore preachers would do well to consider their choice of words and the emotion and thought they communicate. Olenowski also focused on strategies that can help the preacher to offer messages that will relate to the human condition. Olenowski explained, “Creating this “common ground” involves imaging, painting and clarifying our interior emotional lives” (Olenowski, 2000, p.10). Olenowski advocated the use of metaphor, illustration, humor, storytelling, and self-disclosure to create a common ground between preacher and listener.

Nonverbal immediacy has also been shown to greatly affect cognitive learning and to promote favorable outcomes in students (McCroskey, et al., 2002). There is a connection between teachers who are more nonverbally immediate and a favorable response of their students to their lecture. Students interpret nonverbal immediacy in a

teacher as being caring, understandable, and indicating better teachers than those who are less immediate (McCroskey, et al., 2002). Nonverbal immediacy is nonverbal behaviors that communicate approval, fondness, or positive affect to others. McCroskey, et al. suggested several behaviors that teachers do that communicate immediacy such as the teacher looking in the direction of the student, smiling, sitting in proximity to the student, or even touching the student in a nonthreatening manner.

Ambient Teaching

The climate for adult learning is impacted by the physical characteristics of the space in which it is to take place (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Knowles, 1984; White, 1972). Environmental features are important because they have a direct and powerful impact on learning. White (1972) noted, “general estimates indicate that while about seventy-five percent of learning is accounted for by motivation, meaningfulness, and memory, the remaining twenty-five percent of learning is dependent upon the effects of the physical environment” (p. 1). Adult students are more likely than children to be affected by the physical learning environment with an increase in their motivation due to sufficient space, attractive decoration, and functional furnishings (Lane & Lewis, 1971). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) suggested that the physical environment “enhances learner commitment” (p. 246). The term “ambient teaching” is used (K. Lynch, personal communication, December 27, 2010) to describe “the way in which the preacher uses the space and the characteristics and conditions of the space to enhance the message of the oral communication and support adult learning.” Hiemstra and Sisco stated that the physical environment for adult learners is a subject that is often ignored in literature on

adult learning. The reasons offered for ignorance of the physical location included these: (a) adult learning takes place in spaces designed for other age groups, (b) adults lack of perception of the seriousness of the environmental problem, (c) the lack of a budget designated to improve the adult learning physical environment, (d) administrators and teachers do not embrace the responsibility to ensure the learning environment, and (e) those who want to improve the learning environment do not know where to start. Four areas of concern when evaluating adult learning environments are *anthropometry*, *ergonomics*, *proxemics*, and *synaesthetics* (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990), terms that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Anthropometry

Adults display different shapes and sizes. *Anthropometry* focuses on the dimensions of the human body. These dimensions are important to consider when designing adult learning spaces (White, 1972). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) posited that the choice of chairs, their size, padding, shape, and arrangement are real areas of concern. They further submitted that attractiveness or décor concerns may influence selection of seats more than the size or shape of the adults participating (Vosko, 1991). Some other concerns of the furniture that should be considered in a learning environment are those which pertain to movement and interaction. Round tables are optimal for encouraging eye contact and interaction between students (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972).

Ergonomics

The target audience or student should dictate the design of the learning space. Ergonomics deal with bringing comfort to those who occupy a space or use an instrument

(White, 1972). The aspects of size and shape enter into the philosophy or expectation that the teacher has for the instruction within that space. A straight row of seats in a narrow rectangle of a room indicates one way communication of a lecture mode by which knowledge is deposited into passive students or listeners (White, 1972). A semi-circle or wider arrangement of seats indicates the teacher is seeking discussion and dialogue between the students and with the instructor (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990).

Proxemics

The use of space not only defines a physical setting but it also indicates and in some cases creates a culture. Several issues connected to proxemics include gestures, touch or avoidance of touch, eye behavior, and posture (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Sociofugal and sociopetal are two different settings that affect the use of space for adult learners. Sociofugal settings are used in environments where interaction among the students is discouraged and attention is primarily forward towards the lecturer. This arrangement creates a status distinction where students see themselves as nonspecial and having no distinct identity compared with the instructor (White, 1972). Sociopetal settings encourage interaction and can facilitate conversation by having the learners seated facing towards one another. Hard architectural spaces, like those with fixed seating, do not provide for or encourage individual movement or interaction (Fulton, 1991). A common arrangement for a sociopetal setting is a large square where the students are seated around the outside edges or the use of a circular setting or round tables. Soft architectural spaces have furnishings that can be moved or changed and have inherent flexibility (Fulton, 1991; Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972).

Adult learners have learned to choose their seating preferences to accommodate their desired amount of interaction (Vosko, 1991; White, 1972). Hall (1966) claimed that there are four distance zones, the intimate, personal, social, and public, from which the students may choose. Students who have the freedom and ability to move or change their seats benefit through stimulated social and personal growth (Hall, 1966; Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972).

Synaesthetics

Synaesthetics involves the study of how students are affected by the simultaneous use of several of their senses. Many instructors have faced the challenge of extraneous noise from construction, planes, or a noisy adjoining class that interferes with the hearing of their class (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; White, 1972). The lack of light or the over abundance of illumination can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of an instructor's presentation. The key idea is for teachers to be able to select or change the amount of lighting as needed for the task at hand. The impact of colors on the learning environment can affect participation and productivity (White, 1972). Comfort concerns can be noted in temperature and humidity levels as well as in the availability of suitable chairs, bathrooms, and refreshments (Vosko, 1991). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) and Knowles (1980) indicated that much more research needs to be done on the relationships between the human senses such as touch, smell, and taste the outcomes adult learners experience in an adult learning environment.

Critical Review of the Methods for the Study

I used a case study design to analyze the bounded phenomenon which is preaching. Merriam (2009) defined a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 46). A case study explores a case or multiple cases over time utilizing multiple sources of data (Creswell, 1998). The case being studied can be a single site or program or several programs in a multi-site study where the focus is on individuals, an activity, or an event. Within a case study, many methods of collecting data can be used with the researcher as the primary instrument for collecting data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Information regarding the research problem can be collected by various means including interviews, focus groups, and field notes. Qualitative data research supports the hermeneutic paradigm because it explores the lived experience of participants (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative data are presented in a rich, thick narrative to convey the participants’ experiences. A constructivist paradigm “assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study” (Hatch, 2002). Interpretative analysis fits well with a study that focuses on making sense of situations where there is a certain social aspect to the event and the researcher is exploring explanations for what goes on within the event (Hatch, 2002).

Triangulation is as a strategy to strengthen the internal validity of the study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The hermeneutic paradigm provides tools that the researcher can use to connect interpretations to data in an effort to construct meaning that explains the social phenomena in the study (Hatch, 2002). The paradigm will provide

tools to expand the researcher's sensitivity to the complexity of the data collected from the three sources he or she intends to use. This paradigm guides the researcher towards a specific priority as the study is conducted.

Summary

The literature synthesized in Section 2 encompasses topics that inform and relate to the conceptual framework for the study on effective preaching. The review of literature on adult learning included literature on the potential for transforming learning environments into dynamic learner-centered spaces where dialogue is encouraged and interaction is a valued commodity. Literature on communication theory focused on two key characteristics of effective communication, relevancy, and immediacy. Relevancy in communication was explained by the concepts of connection, character, and context. The literature on communication also included the topic of verbal and non-verbal forms of immediacy and their impacts on the learning process. The literature review also includes a section on ambient teaching, which covered the important aspects of an effective learning environment. The last section of the literature review contains literature on the research methods selected for the study. In Section 3 the justification for the study is presented along with the justification for using a qualitative design. Furthermore, details concerning the population, how the interviews were administered, and the data analysis used are included.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this study, I used a qualitative approach with a case study design. I used a case study design to be able to analyze and compare data about how church-going adults are motivated to change as a result of hearing sermons in a church worship service. In this case study, the phenomenon of interest was the experience of listening to a sermon. Data were taken from interviews with five pastors and five focus groups consisting of nine members from five regions of the United States. Five regions were chosen to illustrate the prevalence of the problem of preachers that may lack knowledge on the components of sermons that affect their listeners' lives and to better understand the experiences of the adult church-goer. The church-goers in the sample were from the same churches as the pastors interviewed. The goal was to understand the impact of the sermon on adult listeners as it relates to adult learning principles and communication theory. By interpreting the qualitative data, I sought to understand how the use of adult learning, communication and ambient teaching affects the churchgoers' experience of a sermon. The data can be shared with preachers so that they will better understand the elements needed to make preaching to adult listeners effective.

The research on adult learning concepts is substantive and includes studies of both quantitative and qualitative designs (Brown, 2006; Simmons, 2007; Taylor, 2009; Yang, 2004; Yoshimoto, 2007). There has also been research (Carrell, 2009; Kersson-Griep, 2001; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004) on communication theory, but none of the researchers used a qualitative design to research adult learning and communication

theory and their effects on religious adult education. This study is significant for two reasons: (a) no other researchers linked adult learning practices, ambient teaching, and communication techniques to the work of preaching, and (b) I inform preachers seeking to impact listeners in such a way to stimulate transformational change.

The main research question that guided the study was the following: “In the experience of church-going adults, how do the principles of adult learning, ambient teaching, and communication theory relate to the effectiveness of sermons?” I attempted to provide preachers a new appreciation for the experiences of church-goers as they listen to and apply sermons.

Research Design and Approach: Qualitative Study

I employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research takes place within a natural setting, and so this research took place within a small group of churches in the United States in which the preacher teaches and that the church-goers attend. A qualitative design was chosen over quantitative because I wanted to explore the experiences of church-goers in their own words. This study enabled me to gain a level of detail about each church service as well being an active participant involved in the actual experiences of the participants. The qualitative case study design was chosen to explore the external and internal factors that are important components in urging church-goers to change. The case study strategy was chosen because it facilitates answering the “how” and “why” questions being posed (Yin, 2009). Additionally, these factors were used to assess whether preachers are preaching in ways that are conducive to learning for adult churchgoers. Merriam (1998) stated, “qualitative case study is an ideal design for

understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena” (p. 2). I described and analyzed the bounded phenomenon which is preaching. The three factors by which the study was bounded were the nature of the participants, the location of the participants, and the views of the participants relating to the phenomenon of preaching. The case study tradition was chosen over the biographical tradition for a focus on more than one individual. The phenomenological tradition allows for a focus on a small group of select individuals. This method was rejected because I wanted to use a wider scope that included interviews, observations, and focus groups to collect data.

Several variations of qualitative study designs could have been used to explore the experiences and observations of ministers and church-going adults as they relate to what they perceive is missing in the preaching process. Action research, which is often used to promote some change or action, could be chosen for this study. I would assume a more active role with the study’s participants than that of a case study. A narrative inquiry variation of qualitative studies focuses on constructing a narrative version of the data in an effort to give the reader a sense of being there (Yin, 2011). The case study design had some overlap with narrative inquiry but was focused more on a phenomenon in its real world context. The use of focus groups allowed me to stimulate discussion on topics relating to the study in order to generate data (Hatch, 2002). The goal was to provide an environment whereby the participants could engage in conversations that allowed them to explore in-depth their experience with preaching. The interaction of group members gave the focus group its uniqueness as a data collection method. A disadvantage to the method is the reality that the setting may not accurately reflect conversations in a natural setting

for several reasons. Two reasons for such a concern are connected to the amount of control the researcher exerts on the breadth of the conversation as well as the reticence of some participants to speak up in such settings (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2011).

Research Questions

The overarching question in this study was how do church-going adults perceive the sermon? There were three subquestions for the study which follow:

1. How do the principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching make a difference in the effectiveness of sermons as described by churchgoing adults?
2. What perceptions do preachers have about the effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on the effectiveness of their sermons?
3. How do the views of preachers and churchgoers align on the topic of elements that comprise effective sermons?

Setting and Sample

The sample, participants, or sources of data, as Yin (2011) equated them, were drawn from consistent church-going adults between the ages of 25 and 65. Consistent church-going adults were defined as those who have sat under the Sunday morning preaching of this particular pastor at least 10 times in the last year. I located churches from five regions of the United States through referrals from colleagues. Churches were all Christian but varied in denomination and size. The denominations included Baptist, Bible, Catholic, Christian, and Foursquare Gospel. The churches where the observations, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews took place were selected based on the responses

of pastors who volunteered their church to be one of the five participating churches. I selected one church from five different regions of the United States to capture how different cultures may affect interpretations of the participants' experiences. The selection of data collection units from different regions as well as different denominations supported my intent to follow the suggestion of Yin (2011) to seek to "include those that might offer contrary evidence or views" (p. 88). The churches used for the study were selected through referrals.

Participants in the focus groups were identified by being one of the first nine adults who met the study criteria and who volunteered as a result of an announcement given in the worship service and printed in the church bulletin. According to the qualitative research perspective, no direct correlation can be found between the quality of a study and the number of participants (Hatch, 2002). For this qualitative study, the term sample was used interchangeably with the terms participants and respondents. The type of sampling that was used in the study was convenience sampling. This type of sampling was chosen over random sampling because the participants came from a naturally formed group. A convenience sample is possible when the researcher must use groups (e.g., a classroom, a church, a family unit) that are naturally formed or volunteers as participants in the study (Creswell, 2009). The use of convenience sampling may not be the preferred method when trying to validate a study (Hatch, 2002). Yin (2011) stated two reasons that this method is not preferred is the likeliness of incomplete information and the undesired degree of bias. Hatch (2002) described a criterion sample as one in which "individuals ... fit particular predetermined criteria" (p. 99). Since all of the participants were consistent

church-going adults between the ages of 25 and 64, all of the criteria were met. The goal was to achieve a sample size of 45 adults participating in five focus groups of nine adults. The justification for this size sample was based on Hatch's (2002) statement that most tests on focus groups recommend that group size be from six to 12. Furthermore, small numbers are recommended when participants "have a strong connection to intense issues" or to "give individuals room for going more deeply into a topic than will be possible with many participants" (Hatch, 2002, p. 135). One-on-one interviews with the preaching pastors of each of the five participating churches were conducted to further understand the church-goers' experiences as well as explore the perspective of the preacher.

Methods for Ethical Protection of Participants

Prior to the study, I obtained a signed letter of cooperation from the oversight board or officer of each church to conduct the study in the respective church (Appendix B). A signed consent form was also obtained from all the participants in the focus groups (Appendix C). Each pastor participating in the one-on-one interviews was also required to sign a consent form before being interviewed (Appendix D). The participants had the ongoing right to withdraw from the study at any point throughout the study requesting withdrawal either verbally or in writing (Creswell, 1998).

The confidentiality of the participants in the research was protected by several methods. First, letters from A to E and pseudonyms were assigned to the five participating churches. Secondly, the real names of participants were not used in the study, and instead pseudonyms were assigned. Interviews and focus groups took place in

secure rooms in the participants' church building and I kept the transcripts in a locked file box throughout the data collection and analysis. Lastly, I followed the suggestion of Rubin and Rubin (2005) and provided participants with transcripts so that they could correct them as well as peruse my final report before submission.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

In a qualitative study, the methods need to be interactive (Creswell, 2009). In the study, the active participation consisted of focus groups and structured interviews with the two groups of participants. Detailed observation notes were taken while I attended the preaching service. I endeavored to provide enough detail about the experience of the church-going adult participants so that readers of this study would be able to place themselves into the shoes of the participants (Hatch, 2002). Data were collected relying on the individuals' constructions of how they interpreted their churchgoing experience as it related to their perception of a learning environment. To augment the data collection, I used a physical learning environment assessment tool to record observations to synthesize with participants' perceptions of the learning environment (Appendix E). During the preaching, I recorded observations by filling out the communications assessment tool (Appendix F). After the listening to the sermon, I noted observations on adult learning concepts on the assessment tool for adult learning (Appendix G). The interviews with preachers were structured so that they could be planned, audio recorded, and would demonstrate that procedures identified by Hatch (2002) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) were followed. During each interview I used an interview guide made up of open-ended questions that provided participants the opportunity to explain their experiences in

preaching to churchgoers (Appendix H). The participants in the focus groups were permitted to enter into an open dialogue with the group being prompted by probing questions that I had prepared to guide the discussion (Appendix I). This procedure allowed me to listen to the data for clues about the churchgoers' experiences and perceptions that provided data to address the problem and the research questions (Hatch, 2002). Prior to my visits to the pastors, I notified the participating pastors by e-mail and phone requesting a time when they could be observed and interviewed face-to-face within the same week. All participants signed a consent form with an understanding that their information from participation in the study would remain confidential. As previously stated, these participants were invited to participate because their pastor volunteered their church as a location for the research and as church-goers, the individuals responded to the invitation to participate.

The Researcher's Role

Data were collected through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and observations. I was the sole instrument for data collection and analysis. Permission was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board to conduct the study and no data were collected until the approval had been received. Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-09-11-0055237 and it expires on June 8, 2012. Steps were taken to ensure ethical protection of all participants. I secured a letter of cooperation from each one of the participating churches and letters of consent from all participants. All data collected were stored and secured in a locked file cabinet in my office and participants were given assurance of complete confidentiality. None of the real names of

the churches, pastors, or any participant were contained in the study. In order to ensure accuracy in the findings, several strategies were implemented (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2009) stated that the researcher's presence, triangulation, and the use of description aid in bringing rigor to a qualitative study. I worked to capture the thoughts and feelings of the participants as they discussed their experience in participating in preaching services. The knowledge of adult learning and communication theory was applied in the analysis of the participants' experiences in preaching services. E-mail discussions for the purpose of checking the accuracy of transcripts was conducted between the researcher and participants as a part of the data collection process.

Field notes and transcriptions were used to collect and record data. The procedures to select participants were followed and once the participants agreed to participate in the study, I established the locations, dates, and times for the interviews. Subsequently, the interviews and focus groups were conducted as face-to-face meetings. These interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed for the purpose of developing themes and theories. Observations were recorded throughout the preaching services as well as during focus groups and interviews and then e-mailed to the participants for accuracy and member checking.

There is a certain element of bias in that I am an ordained minister. As a conservative evangelical preacher, I have beliefs concerning the need for sermons to be exegetical and expository. These beliefs were bracketed and noted in my log during the interviews so that they did not interfere with the process. Bracketing included my being careful not to lead the interviews or discussions in a certain direction with a line of

questioning. My personal reflexivity not only carries with it a bias in being an ordained minister but is also offset by the benefit of being an insider, as it were, to the practice and profession of preaching. I enjoyed enhanced rapport and ability to ask probing questions due to my experience and familiarity with the preaching process. The ability to gauge honesty and accuracy in participants' responses as well as a lack of shock and disorientation served me well in my insider status. I was able to bring understanding and insight to the study even though some of the churches were from different denominations than mine. I was also an outsider because I was unfamiliar with the particular settings and people at each site. This outsider quality came with a freedom of entanglement which allowed me to ask questions freely with no fear of offending ongoing situations that may have existed in the churches.

In addition to triangulation, two other techniques, peer debriefing and member checking, were used to ensure internal validity (Merriam, 2009). The transcriptions of interviews and focus groups were e-mailed back to participants to ask them if the data were accurate. Colleagues of mine, serving as peer debriefers, were asked to comment on the interpretations to check for researcher bias.

Researcher-Participant Relationship and Procedures

When five churches and their pastors had been chosen and consented to the study, they were contacted by phone and e-mail. In the phone call and e-mail, I explained the purpose of the observations, focus group, and one-on-one interview with the pastor. The date for the weekend of participation was one that was convenient for the pastor's schedule. The pastor was asked to put an announcement requesting volunteers for the

study in the church bulletin for at least 2 consecutive weeks. The date, time, and criteria for participants were included in the bulletin announcement with a statement simply stating the focus of the study was on church-going adults. The pastor was also asked for an appointment for my interview with him. The interview of the pastor was scheduled on a day that closely followed the Sunday worship service in which the pastor's preaching was observed.

Each focus group lasted no more than 60 minutes. Part of the selection process for finding participants for the focus group was to ascertain that they all meet the criteria to participate. After nine adults meeting the criteria were selected, every participant signed on to the code of civility agreement as well as the consent form. Each group began with my disclosing that the discussion would be recorded by a digital voice recorder and I would be taking field notes. The purpose of the focus group was explained and the participants were informed that at any time during the discussion, they could refuse to participate. Participants were informed that their names or any other ways to identify them would not be revealed during or after the study. Fictitious names were used to protect their privacy. After participants were given a chance to ask questions, the focus group discussion began. I used follow-up questions as warranted.

During the focus group, I made notes that added additional information provided by the participants. I looked for additional data in the participants' responses, verbal and nonverbal emotional expression, or for information to probe using follow-up questions. When there were only 10 minutes remaining, I informed the participants of the time and asked if they had any other information that they wanted to add to the study. I thanked the

participants for their participation and gave them an e-mail address to which they could send additional comments concerning the focus group questions if they were reticent to share in the group setting. The deadline for e-mail contribution was a week after the date of the focus group. Participants were also told that a transcript of their discussion would be sent to them by e-mail. The transcripts of the focus group recordings were transcribed into documents that were sent to each of the participants to check for accuracy.

The pastors signed a consent form before the church was confirmed as a participating church. The interviews with the pastors were designed to last 30-60 minutes. Each interview began with my disclosing that the interview would be recorded by a digital voice recorder and I would be taking field notes as well. The purpose of the interview was explained and the pastor was informed that at any time during the discussion he or she could refuse to participate. Participants were informed that their names or any other way to identify them would not be revealed during or after the study. After the pastor was given a chance to ask questions, the interview began. An interview guide was used with the addition of follow-up questions as warranted. During the interview, I made notes that added additional information to that provided by the pastor. I was listening for additional data in the participant's responses or for information to probe using follow-up questions. When there were only 5 minutes remaining, I informed the participants of the time and asked they if they had any other information to add to the study. The participants were thanked for participation and informed about the transcript of their interview that would be sent by e-mail. The voice recording was transcribed into a document that was sent to the pastor to check for accuracy.

The notes from the focus group sessions and interviews were read and analyzed immediately following each interview. Transcriptions of the data followed. The transcripts were kept in a locked file box to secure the privacy of the participants. Copies of the transcripts were sent to participants for their editing to check for accuracy.

Selection of Participants

When collecting qualitative data, the participants determine what will be included or excluded in the data that is given to the researcher (Hatch, 2002) because it is they who have had the experience being studied and it is through them that quality data will be collected (Creswell, 2009). To ensure the data collected were usable, I managed the interview to focus it on the research questions.

I contacted five churches in five regions of the United States. The regions of the country were the northeast, south, midwest, north, and west. I purposefully chose different denominations of churches. The selection of the regions and the denominations to participate in the study expressed my intent to obtain a diverse look at the problem. I enlisted the help of 10 participants, nine churchgoers, and the preaching pastor from each church. The nine churchgoers were chosen by taking the first nine adults who volunteered for the focus group and who met the following criteria.

1. The participant was between the ages of 25 and 64 years of age.
2. The participant was self-described as a consistent church-goer.
3. The participant was available for the entire 60-minute discussion.
4. The participant was willing to sign on to a code of civility for the group.

The four criteria assisted in selecting the participants who represented the population and provided insightful and relevant data that answered the research questions and explored the cause of the research problem. The age group was targeted so as to sample independent adults with active lifestyles.

Data Collection Procedures

I contacted the participating churches and secured a letter of cooperation. The pastor was provided with an interview consent form to sign prior to the date of the interview. Criteria for focus group participants were communicated to the pastor of the church along with a request that the criteria along with an invitation to join the group be printed in the church bulletin. I established a date and time with the pastor to attend and observe a preaching service, conduct a focus group with churchgoers, and conduct an interview with the pastor. While observing a preaching service, I took notes of my observations. Observations included people's gestures and social interactions as well as the physical environment (Yin, 2011). The selectivity of choosing Sunday morning worship services reflected a deliberate part of the data collection procedure. I developed the assessment tools specifically for this study. The content was drawn from adult learning concepts based on the summation of the sources read for this study. The assessment tools used to record observation data (Appendix E-G) were set aside prior to the focus group and interview sessions in an effort to be unbiased throughout the data collection process.

Because observations are not filtered by what someone else reports concerning an event to be studied, they are considered to be a form of primary data (Yin, 2011). While

observing, it was important that I be aware that because I could not be at all places at all times, the resulting selectivity has consequences. I recorded my observational times and locations as a way of addressing this matter of selectivity. Yin (2011) suggested four relevant categories of subjects to be observed, namely (a) characteristics of individuals, (b) interactions between people, (c) activity taking place, and (d) the physical surroundings. One way I tried to strengthen this study was by recording observations of physical traces or unobtrusive measures knowing that I had not influenced the participant's behavior that created them. A common feature for studies using observation for recording data is the importance of contemplating rival explanations (Yin, 2011). In analyzing the data I collected from church-goer participants, I considered social trends and other influences that may also explain how adults learn from sermons.

The focus group participants were given a consent form during a time of introduction before the group began discussion. I secured a signed consent form before beginning focus group discussion. I audio recorded and conducted all five of the focus group discussions. I also recorded and conducted the interviews with the preaching pastors. All recordings were transcribed by a transcription service that had signed a confidentiality agreement. The collection of data during the focus groups and personal interviews focused on verbal and nonverbal communications such as respondents' recollection or explanation of some behavior or action (Yin, 2011).

Hatch (2002) argued that focus groups are supplemental sources of data that should be combined with data from other sources. Therefore in this study, I used observations and individual interviews to complement data from focus groups. Five focus

groups were conducted to provide a bulk of field data that would be sufficient in amount for the qualitative study (Yin, 2011). Conducting focus groups comes with dynamics that need to be managed. During the focus groups, I was conscious of the need to exercise skill in controlling participants who may dominate the group's discussion while stimulating the reluctant ones to share their valued perspective (Yin, 2011).

The interview with the preaching pastor differed from that of structured interviews (Yin, 2011) in that the preacher and I did not have a strictly scripted conversation. No questionnaire of the complete list of questions to be asked was given to the participant. Even though I had a framework of study questions, the questions I asked each participant varied based on the context of the interview. Second, I used a conversational mode leading to a somewhat social relationship. This process aided intense listening that Rubin and Rubin (1995) described as "a systematic effort to really hear and understand what people tell you" (p.17). Last, I used open-ended questions in an effort to elicit deeper answers not limited to a single word. The intent was to have the participants answer in their own words without using predefined terms from the researcher (Yin, 2011).

As stated earlier, I visited five sites for the case study. During each site visit, I attended a preaching service and recorded observations on instruments created to note adult learning, communication, and ambient teaching concepts (Appendix E, Appendix F, and Appendix G). While at each site, I conducted a focus group with the church-going adults after they attended a worship service. I also conducted a personal interview with the preaching pastor. Each interview was recorded and I took observation notes during

the interviews. I kept a research log as well as jotted my observations all throughout the data collection and analysis. I remained focused trying to understand how the parts fit together and where the data would be best included to benefit the study. The data from the audio recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed and sent to participants for member checking to ensure capture of intended meaning. As a preacher, I was careful to bracket my own experiences and opinions before beginning the coding process. The initial coding culled the data to select relevant text to the specific research concerns. The text was then grouped by repeating ideas. Codes were assigned to participants' responses spontaneously as I read them. The repeating ideas were then sorted into recurring themes. Significance was given when specific ideas, attributes, or characteristics were mentioned by a minimum of four church focus groups or preachers. Some of the data could be clustered together to form new categories and raise the significance of the category pass the threshold of being mentioned by four or more focus groups or preachers.

Finally, the data were examined to search for connecting themes that addressed the research questions. The idea was to construct meaning that would interpret some aspect of the phenomenon of preaching as it informs what makes it effective.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data from focus groups and personal interviews started with the culling of the unrelated data from the transcripts. The data were then coded in three cycles, once for each of the research questions focus. The data collected from the interviews, observations, and focus groups were coded according to recurring themes. After coding the data, I charted them for the frequency of relevant ideas. Frequency

charting was done for principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching. I used codes to separate themes dealing with activities, processes, and relationships. The themes that emerged from the coding process were analyzed using the findings in the studies reviewed in section 2. The data were collected over a 2-month period which allowed for some weekends where access to the churches was not available.

Coding

After the focus groups and interviews were transcribed, a coding process was implemented. I was careful to bracket out my own experiences and opinions. The interviews and focus group questions focused on methods and elements of adult learning and communication theory as they relate to the research questions. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) advocated a five-step process in codifying data into a theoretical narrative. The first step is to cull the data using a criterion of what is relevant to the specific research concern. The relevant text is then grouped by repeating ideas. These ideas are sorted into reoccurring themes which can be grouped into theoretical constructs. Finally, the theoretical constructs give a summary of what was learned about the research concerns being written as a theoretical narrative (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). A table synthesizing the interview and focus group questions with the research questions were used to cross check varying perceptions of common themes (Appendix J). It was hoped that the questions would solicit data that could be coded. Therefore the coding was analyzed to determine the extent to which it mirrored the themes and concepts presented in the literature review and the interview guide (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). During the coding process, each theme was assigned a different color to provide a visual aid for

analysis. A display was constructed to illustrate emerging concepts, themes, and their relationships. Similar concepts were clustered to reveal major topics (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation was used by finding connections between the data collected in the focus groups and interviews with my observation notes. Additional triangulation was accomplished by linking themes from phone call logs and e-mail exchanges between the participants and me.

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative studies is not defined by the replicability of the study but by the quality of being dependable and consistent (Merriam & Associates, 2002). A dependable or valid study is one that comes to conclusions that are an accurate reflection of the real world in which it was studied (Yin, 2011). One measure of reliability in this study came from the internal consistency because I questioned churchgoers about the aspects of preaching that are most effective for their own learning. The interviews and focus groups provided information concerning the participants' experience in the church preaching service. The question concerning the study's reliability is connected to the questions whether the study conducted as intended and did the process explore the experience as envisioned? The possibility of reflexivity was minimized and countered by observing unobtrusive measures and through triangulation of the data. The techniques of peer review and member checking were employed to ensure reliability in the accurate recording and presentation of data. Member checking ensured the accuracy of the data collected while the review by my peers focused on accuracy in the analysis of the data. I discussed the data and its analysis with a fellowship of local pastors to get their feedback.

Participants in the study received transcripts of interviews and focus groups as well as conclusions from the data as a means of respondent validation. When the study was complete, I wanted to be able to conclude that the findings of the study accurately described the experience of churchgoers and the results of the study make sense.

Means for Triangulation

Researchers seek strategies that they may employ in order to bring credibility to their study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Associates, 2002). One of the strategies is triangulation. Triangulation is a strategy that was used at the conclusion of the data collection. Triangulation was achieved by collecting personal interview and focus group data from the participants as well as data from observations to allow me to address a wider range of issues (Yin, 2009). The use of different data sources enabled me to analyze evidence from the different sources in order to construct coherent reasoning for data themes (Creswell, 2009). To enhance the accuracy of the interpretations of data, the description of themes were reviewed by the participants to determine whether they felt they were accurate. In the attempt to communicate the findings of the study, rich, thick description was employed (Creswell, 2009). Thick description refers to the way the researcher strives to reduce the selectivity arising from preconceived categories (Yin, 2011). Yin (2011) described successful thick description as a description that “moves the interpretation away from researcher-centric perspectives, portraying instead the people, events, and actions within locally meaningful contexts” (p. 213). In an effort to record thick description, I observed body language and tone of voice of focus group members and the pastor interviewees to note the ways in which these behaviors accentuated the

respondent's words. Finally, my biases as an ordained member of the clergy and an advocate of non-traditional methods in reaching contemporary congregations were explained to participants. As mentioned earlier, I made notes in log to capture possible researcher bias.

Summary

Section 3 presented the research design and approach for the qualitative study. The research questions are restated with methods and procedures that were used to collect the related data. My role was discussed as well as the procedures I used for selecting and gaining access to participants. An explanation was given concerning how I handled the issues of ethical protection and confidentiality. Reliability for the study was bolstered by utilizing a design that includes triangulation.

Section 4 presents the study's findings by themes as well as a profile of the participants.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experience of church-going adults and pastors to understand how they perceive a sermon. Data collection which included focus groups, personal interviews, and observations as described in Section 3. I employed five focus groups with church-going adults and five personal interviews with pastors from five denominations in five regions within the United States. The different sites produced results that appeared to be a shared culture and experience. The only words that were found to be unique or particular to one church were the words *homily* and *Eucharist*. The data were collected using open-ended questions that guided the discussions. The discussion-guides questions were placed into a matrix to show their relationship to the three research questions which formed the study (Appendix J). After analyzing the data, I rearranged my previous alignment of the discussion questions with the research questions on the matrix in order to reflect the relationship that emerged from the data.

Qualitative Data Collection

In this section, the data taken from five focus groups with church-goers and five personal interviews with preachers are described. All church-goer participants were self-described as between 25 and 64 years of age and consistent church-goers. The preachers interviewed were either the pastors of the respective churches or one of the regular preachers for that particular church. The participants in the focus groups were asked eight open-ended questions about their experience listening to sermons. The preachers were

interviewed using nine open-ended questions about their perspective, training, and experience as preachers. The focus groups were conducted immediately after the observed preaching with the exception of one which met a few hours later. The preachers were interviewed within a couple days following the observed preaching. Each focus group and personal interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Observation notes were taken during preaching, focus groups, and personal interviews. Some of the observations were more formal using instruments that I created and some were simply written on whatever paper was available at the time.

In the open coding of the data, I found how similarly the participants, regardless of their location or affiliation, described what makes sermons effective. In the open coding, I found 98 terms that the church-going adults participating in the study used to describe effective sermons. In the axial coding, I found that all five focus groups agreed on the use of two words, *applicable* and *challenging*, to define an effective sermon. These were the only two words that any three pastors agreed on in describing what makes a sermon effective. Observations regarding ambient learning, communication theory, and adult learning concepts were recorded on instruments I developed in an effort to triangulate data taken during the focus groups and interviews. These observations correlated with church-goers' comments about their experiences listening to sermons. One such correlation was found in the church-goers' affect for their preacher and the perceived effectiveness of that preacher's sermons. A disconnect between communication theory related to the relevance and the practice of preachers in that at a time of high unemployment, not one preacher discussed employment or related issues in his sermon,

even though focus group participants reported that they need applicable sermons. Another contrast was found in the desire of church-goers for clear-cut introductions and conclusions and yet only one sermon of the five sermons I observed included such an organizational pattern.

In Section 4, I present an analysis of several themes that arose during the coding of the data. The themes are presented and analyzed in connection with the research questions that guided the study on the elements that comprise effective sermons. In the section that follows, I present the findings by themes and participant type but no attempt was made in the presentation, given the constraint of time, to distinguish between participants of the individual churches. In examining the perceptions of five preachers as well as the experience of 45 church-going adults, I found that there was no disconnect between preachers and church-going adults with respect to the essential elements for effective sermons. While preachers indicated awareness of themes and elements regarding the communication of sermons, they seemed to lack an understanding of the underlying issues impacting sermon effectiveness.

Profile of Participants

The following paragraphs give a description of each church as an introduction to the participants in the study. Descriptions were created from data contributed by the pastors of the individual churches. The churches are presented in the order in which they were visited.

St. Appositus Church

St. Appositus Church is a Catholic church that has 5,000 registered members with an average of 1,300 weekly attendees. The congregation is young with many small children. The church is located outside a small city surrounded by several other small cities. The church campus includes the new worship center which is modern with a simple yet welcoming design as well as an old stone chapel which is more ornate with a traditional look. A rectory is located on the property down a short drive named after Father Wilson. The church also operates a food pantry in a separate metal building on the campus. The ethnic makeup of the congregation is 95% Caucasian with a few Hispanic and African American members. Most of the members are white collar workers with a few blue collar workers and a good number of workers in information technology. The pastor, Father Wilson, is a soft-spoken man in his 60s who has been at the church for over 20 years. His theological preparation includes a Ph.D., for which his dissertation was written on prayer. The focus group from the church included seven females and two males ranging from 40 to 60 years old.

Crossroads Church

Crossroads Church is a Bible church that has 200 registered members with an average of 100 weekly attendees. The congregation has a blend of ages but is primarily middle-aged. The church is located in a rural area with a few small cities within 25 miles. The worship center is a brick building with a simple rectangular design without much decoration. There is a fellowship hall with a kitchen in a building close by as well as a parsonage which is inhabited by the pastor and his family. The ethnic makeup of the

congregation is primarily Caucasian with few exceptions. Most of the members are blue collar workers with 20% white collar workers and 5% of workers in information technology. The pastor, Brother Franklin, is a warm and friendly man in his 40s who has been at the church for nearly 10 years. His theological preparation includes just one homiletics course taken while getting a bachelor's degree in secondary education from a Bible college. The focus group from the church included two females and seven males ranging from 30 to 60 years old.

First Ordinance Church

First Ordinance Church is a Baptist church with 1,175 members. The congregation is middle-aged. The church is located in a large city surrounded by several small cities. The worship center is a large brick building which has an auditorium, classrooms, and a foyer that wraps around the multidoor entry to the auditorium. The auditorium is large with seating for nearly 1,000 people. It is fairly ornate with a raised platform, large choir loft, modesty panels, a large pulpit, pews, and ample decorations. The campus also houses a Christian school, office buildings, and residences used for various purposes. The total church campus covers a full city block. The ethnic makeup of the congregation is 90% Caucasian. Forty-five percent of the members are white collar workers with 30% being blue collar workers and 25% being workers in information technology. The pastor, Brother Smith, is a professional man in his 40s who has recently succeeded his father-in-law as pastor of the church. He was a lawyer before entering pastoral ministry. His theological preparation includes two homiletics courses while

receiving a master of divinity degree from seminary. The focus group from the church included four females and five males ranging from 30 to 60 years old.

Antioch Church

Antioch Church is a Christian church that has 150 members. The congregation is young with many small children. The church is located in a large city surrounded by several small cities. The neighborhood is established and near busy interstate traffic. The worship center is in a brick building that is nearly 50-years-old. The building houses many classrooms, a children's center, a café, and offices as well as a rectangular shaped auditorium. The auditorium was recently remodeled to bring the ceiling down and modernize the platform. Tapestries hung from the walls above the platform in front of the auditorium and several rows of pews were removed in the rear of the auditorium. The whole interior of the building was modernized with the exception of the carpet and pews. The ethnic makeup of the congregation is mainly Caucasian with a few members being Hispanic or Black. Half of the members are white collar workers and the other half being blue collar workers. Pastor Thomas, is a modern man in his 30s. He is the son of a pastor. His theological preparation includes a bachelor of science and a master of arts degree with emphasis on preaching. The focus group from the church included four females and five males ranging from 25 to 45 years old.

Stream of Mercy Church

Stream of Mercy Church is a Four-Square Gospel church that has 20 members with an average of 12 weekly attendees. The congregation is mixed with few children. The church currently meets in the basement of a member's large home which is in a small

city outside of a large city. The basement is furnished with several couches, chairs, and a whiteboard. The church had been meeting in a school while saving to purchase property. The ethnic makeup of the congregation is Caucasian. Fifty percent of the members are white collar workers with the other 50% being information technology workers. The pastor, Bill Jones, is bivocational and is in his 50s. He owns and manages a window washing business which leaves him 20 to 30 hours to devote to the church each week. His theological preparation includes a bachelor's degree in religious studies as well as a master of divinity degree in Christian education and evangelism. The focus group from the church included three females and five males ranging from 25 to 55 years old.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Table 1 lists the pseudonym each participant was assigned and the church where they participated.

Table 1

Participant Pseudonym and Association with a Church

Participant	Pseudonym	Church
Pastor	Father Wilson	St. Appositus
Female	Wanda	St. Appositus
Female	Wendy	St. Appositus
Female	Wilda	St. Appositus
Female	Winnie	St. Appositus
Female	Whitney	St. Appositus
Female	Wenona	St. Appositus
Female	Willow	St. Appositus
Male	Waldo	St. Appositus
Male	Wayne	St. Appositus
Pastor	Brother Franklin	Crossroads
Female	Fern	Crossroads
Female	Faye	Crossroads
Male	Felix	Crossroads
Male	Fitz	Crossroads
Male	Flint	Crossroads
Pastor	Brother Smith	First Ordinance
Female	Sacha	First Ordinance
Female	Sally	First Ordinance
Male	Shea	First Ordinance
Male	Sam	First Ordinance
Male	Simon	First Ordinance

(Table 1 continues)

Participant Pseudonym and Association with a Church

Participant	Pseudonym	Church
Pastor	Pastor Thomas	Antioch
Female	Tanya	Antioch
Female	Tabby	Antioch
Female	Tina	Antioch
Female	Teri	Antioch
Male	Tex	Antioch
Male	Todd	Antioch
Male	Tim	Antioch
Pastor	Bill Jones	Stream of Mercy
Female	Joy	Stream of Mercy
Female	Julie	Stream of Mercy
Male	Jack	Stream of Mercy
Male	Jed	Stream of Mercy
Male	Jim	Stream of Mercy
Male	John	Stream of Mercy

Evidence of Quality

I audio recorded all interviews and focus groups with a digital recorder to ensure the capture of not only the script but also the tone of all the participants' responses. The audio recordings were transcribed and a copy of the transcription was sent to participants for member checking. Observation instruments were used and completed before leaving

the room where the observations were made. The formal and informal observation data enabled triangulation of data and clarification of findings. The findings and conclusions were shared with peers for their examination of the findings and conclusions to determine accuracy and reasonableness. By keeping a study journal, I was able to organize and critically evaluate what I was learning through the planning, execution, and analysis of the data taking process. It also aided in keeping the “big picture” of the study in focus. My overall creativity was enhanced by the recording and reflection of my thoughts and actions in my study journal. The journal and memos that I kept to record decisions, reflections, and strategies throughout the study also provided an audit trail of the research process (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Focus Groups

It was my intent to provide a forum for church-going adults to speak to the issues they deemed important in the process of being educated through the medium of preaching. In a manner of speaking, it was an effort to give the people in the pew a voice to offer input to those who preach to them. The open-ended questions were designed to move from general perspectives regarding their experience with sermons to specific elements of sermons they believed were fundamentally necessary as the discussion progressed. The design was used to provide a safe, casual environment where participants could be free to express what helps them learn from a sermon. The eight questions asked from the guide (Appendix I) drew data relating to the first research question which explored the experience of church-going adults. The data from these questions were also

used in juxtaposition with data from personal interview questions in answering the third and final research question.

In the first two questions, focus group participants were asked to describe their reaction to the sermon they just heard and describe how it made them feel or how it prompted them. Participants indicated a cognitive response in statements like “an awakening,” “made me think,” “humbled me as to my knowledge,” “easy to remember with three key words,” “responsibility to use the information,” “reinforced some of my own thoughts,” and “gave it back to us to figure out what we can do.” Some participants indicated more of an emotional response such as “this is what I need to strive for in the future,” “refreshing and from the heart,” “I could identify with what was being said,” and “the feeling of solidarity.”

In the third and fourth question, I asked church-goers to reflect on what affects their ability to hear sermons. The participants indicated that the factors affecting their ability to hear sermons could be classified into two categories, one dealing with the content of the sermon, and the other dealing with the characteristics of the preacher. The desired sermon content was described as “informational,” “applicable,” “emotional,” as well as “enjoyable.” Participants said they would like their experience listening to sermons to include “to learn something new,” “to be full of knowledge but not overly scholarly,” “something I can apply today,” “if you can take God’s Word and apply it to your life today,” “give me a task that improves my life this week,” “life application can be derived from it, ...make a difference in my life,” “ones that stir my emotions,” “be consoled and challenged in every homily,” “things that are personal to me in my life,”

“some element for me of the community,” “being enjoyable and also entertaining,” and “the visual stuff.”

The effective preacher was described as one who has “interactive type lessons,” “a mix of strength and seriousness with laughter and humor,” “a conversational style, not in that preachy tone,” and he or she also “talk[s] with you not talking at you.” The character of the effective preacher would be one that is, “full of love but challenges you to improve,” “very capable,” “gives something from the pastor’s heart,” “they can come down and be amongst the people,” or “they start out by saying, I have problems with this.”

The fifth focus group question churchgoers were asked was what impact their relationship with the preacher has on their ability to hear sermons. Every focus group verified that their relationship with the preacher impacted their ability to hear sermons. They stated, “that’s a big thought on my mind,” “the relationship outside the sermon or preaching is a big thing,” and “there is a strong connection.” In contrast to comments made connecting effective sermons to the character of the preacher, one focus group participant, a female, disagreed and stated, “I try to not to connect those two together,” and offered this explanation, “I believe that the Lord can take any old wild man off the street and deliver a beautiful message through him.” Other focus group members explained their perspective as, “kind of like you have to size them up first before you can listen to what they have then,” “there has to be an element of trust between the preacher and you,” “consistent in testimony and lifestyle and in preaching and in the way they interact with me,” “being able to listen to more of a trustworthy man,” “if they’re walking

what they're teaching, I'm gonna run with that teaching myself," and "you've got to have trust with him that he's going to do the right thing." Some participants noted the importance of a perceived partnership and emotional bond with the preacher that increases the effectiveness of the preaching. They explained this relationship with, "the more I know about a priest, as in any relationship, then I can understand where he's coming from when he talks," "I view them as being a better partner in this," "he makes people feel included and important," "he is making a total gift of themselves to you," and "to me I appreciate what he has to share more because I feel like he has some investment in me."

In the sixth and seventh focus group questions, the church-going adults were asked for a description of an effective sermon from their experience. Members in all five focus groups agreed that an effective sermon must be "applicable" and "challenging." In all, the focus groups listed 98 modifiers or synonyms for effective sermons. When the 98 words were examined and grouped together according to similar meaning and themes, they yielded 33 ideas. The frequency of those ideas was tallied and nine of those ideas were found to be discussed in at least four of the five focus group discussions (Table 3). Besides applicable and challenging, effective sermons were found to also be convicting, inspiring, entertaining, interesting, informative, compelling, and Scriptural.

The eighth focus group question the churchgoing adults asked was if there was anything that they thought I should know about their experience with their pastor's sermon. Some responses gave descriptions of elements of sermons that help them learn. Comments included "when he used a triangle on the Power Point [it] will stick with me,"

“I just enjoy the stories and analogies tremendously,” and “just something that’s simple and practical and that tomorrow... when I’m out on my jobsite, it’s not Hebrew or Greek, it’s 2011.” Others suggested qualities of the preacher and preaching that made them more receivable like, “it’s the genuineness and being real in your presentation,” “I’m looking for some new insight, after you’ve been in church for ...almost 40 years, there is not too many new things you learn,” or “if I had to give them advice [it] is to love each person that sits in front of you.” Still others were focused on what effective sermons do for them as one female participant stated, “I come to be wowed, to be in awe of my God,” or another announced, “instead of just becoming more smart, we become different people.” Some participants in the focus groups were just thankful, “it’s a good opportunity and I thank you,” and hopeful, “I’m glad you’re doing this to get this out to others, as far as the other denominations as well as upcoming priests, I think they need to hear that--what we are thinking in the pews.”

Personal Interviews

The personal interviews with preachers were conducted to explore and expose their perspectives and attitudes about the educational process involved in preaching. I sought to explore the possible disconnect between what the churchgoing adults shared that they need in order to learn and what the preacher thinks the churchgoers need in order to learn. The interviews included questions regarding the preachers’ formal training for preaching, professional development, and sources of input as well as questions on their perspective on what makes an effective sermon. The nine questions asked from the

interview guide (Appendix H) contributed data to address the second research question which explores the perceptions of preachers.

The first personal interview question the preachers were asked was about their goals for the congregation on any given Sunday. The responses of each preacher varied with each preacher articulating everything from creating a spirit of prayer to simply desiring those in attendance to come back and do it again on a future Sunday. There were eight total goals offered by the five preachers with agreement on only one of the eight. Three of the preachers expressed a goal for their congregations to apply the Bible to their lives and become more Christ-like. The responses contrasted with the description that these same preachers offered when they were asked what makes an effective sermon. When answering question 6 of the personal interview, all five preachers were able to identify the need for an effective sermon to be applicable and connect to some facet of the lives of the listeners. Some of the other goals mentioned were described as: “I want them to get it,” “provide a meaningful and reverent, liturgical experience for them,” and “make the parish as much as possible a welcoming, hospitable parish, so that people feel welcomed here.”

The second and third personal interview questions the preachers were asked were intended to probe their comprehension of churchgoing adults. The second question directly asked the preacher his assessment of the general comprehension of his congregation. All of the preachers perceived the churchgoers as having an adequate level of comprehension. The preachers described their congregations as: “very sophisticated in their comprehension,” “I think overall the congregation does well in that,” “I think they

get it.” “I think we’re hitting the bench marks that we want,” and “I think they’re catching most of what I’m throwing.” Two of the preachers mentioned the diversity in comprehension of their congregations stating: “It’s a little hard because there’s different levels of spirituality,” and “If you were preaching to only one monogamous or whatever group, it would be easier than when you have such diverse comprehension.” The third question in the personal interview asked the preacher about his training in preaching. Only three of the five preachers described training for preaching received in college or seminary courses. Four of the five preachers credited the majority of their training as the result of opportunities to preach and experiences with preaching. Of the five preachers interviewed, only three gave their training a passing grade of seven out of ten or higher. Two of the five preachers could recall some training regarding adult education but none of them could recall any adult learning ideas or terminology. Comments by the preachers reflecting on their training for preaching included: “my formal training in seminary really don’t think helped my congregants at all,” “I use stuff every day, well, every week that I learned in seminary, especially in the realm of preparation,” “I was given all the tools necessary to do this job, the preaching aspect of it,” “the training was on doctrine and scripture,” “on the techniques of preaching [they] were not that great,” and “my actual applicable college coursework toward preaching consisted of one homiletics course.”

The fourth personal interview question the preachers were asked was to identify what factors aid or hinder their message. The preachers in the study named 22 different factors which aid or hinder. The factors differed widely from the need for the preacher during the week to have time for reflection to the structure of the building that the

meetings were held in and the proximity of restrooms. Only five of the 22 factors were repeated with four of the five only mentioned twice. The twice repeated factors concerned the health of the preacher and the sounds during the worship service. Two of the preachers noted that fatigue as well as sickness affected their ability to preach and be heard. Babies crying as well as the worship music leading up to the preaching time were identified as factors that aided or hindered the message by two of the preachers during their personal interview. “Now, I would say big hindrances inside the building would be, babies crying” (Pastor Thomas, Antioch Church). “Often times babies crying or children exiting and slamming doors and things like that during the sermon is a hindrance. A special piece of music that ties in well with your message, it is a tremendous advantage to have people engaged in that and that ties into your content” (Brother Smith, First Ordinance Church). “Music is a vital part of any service. Good music will inform the mind, but it will also enflame the heart. And when the heart is stirred, when the preacher’s heart is stirred by the music and the congregation’s heart is stirred, then that makes a big difference” (Brother Franklin, Crossroads Church).

The preachers from four of the five churches commented that the audio visual or sound system had real potential to aid or hinder the message. This potential was reported with comments including: “the technology we use on Sunday mornings helps tremendously,” “I’m conscious of this thing is ringing or whatever it can really get you sidetracked,” “the hindrances that I perceive, would be technical difficulties with equipment,” and “the fact that our action [preaching] requires being able to hear people well.” Other factors aiding or hindering the message were described as: “being in a

church that is so well rounded,” “good music will inform the mind, but it will also enflame the heart,” “cultural hindrances... activities outside of the church that compete,” “the length of our [meeting] room, maybe it being far back,” “being alert to different things that I experienced during the week, either in the news[or] real life stories,” “if I’m not rested enough, or did not get a good night’s sleep,” “the spiritual atmosphere [and] the engaged nature of the people,” “my own physical wellness or restedness has a lot to do with how competent I am,” and “a good, full church helps.”

The fifth personal interview question the preachers were asked was to describe what they saw as they looked at the congregation. Of the 23 descriptors the preachers used, only two of them-struggling and potential-were used by more than one preacher. The preachers saw the people in their congregations as people who were struggling but also people who possessed tremendous potential. Preachers saw their congregations as people who struggle with sickness, connection, vision, investment, and inspiration. Churchgoers were also seen as having tremendous spiritual, service, and investment potential. Some of the pastors described their congregations as: “really good people,” “people trying to live good lives, struggling, dealing with illness,” [having] tremendous potential in great need,” “a good number ... that have got some pretty screwed up situations,” “untapped potential,” “ [a] person over here who I know is going through marital struggles,” “people who are invested in you, who are sitting on the edge of their chair, and they’re expecting and they want to see and they want to hear something.”. They added “I see this person over here whose mom passed away recently,” and

“tremendous potential for God’s service once a person catches the vision of what they can do for God and what God wants to do for them.”

The sixth personal interview question the preachers were asked was to describe what makes an effective sermon. The preachers offered 31 terms to describe effective sermons. After coding and grouping the terms, three key ideas emerged: sermons must be comprehensible, applicable, and challenging. Each one of these concepts was expressed by at least four of the five pastors during the personal interview. In response to the sixth question of the interview they stated phrases such as: “the effectiveness is simplicity and something that they can understand,” “it needs to have a measure of humor,” “it has to be illustrative and personable,” “not rational, but in that same sense achievable,” “not saying things that make them cringe,” “[makes them] compelled to change,” and “challenging [and] then motivate[ing] them by the challenge to move forward, to do something about what you’ve heard, what you’ve learned.” Pastor Thomas also felt, “We want a sinful mind to be changed...to me an effective [sermon]...if you have people that will repent.”

The seventh personal interview question I asked the preachers focused on their thoughts about the environment in which the preaching takes place. All five preachers listed 21 items of concern they have with the preaching environment. Seventeen of the 21 items referred to the visual aspect of the preaching space. The preachers desired a space in which to preach where they could see the congregation and the members of the congregation could see all the other members. Fan shaped seating, a low platform, as well as good lighting were characteristics suggested when describing what they would like to see in a room for preaching. Sound and climate control systems were two of the other

four items discussed. One of the preachers suggested the preaching environment needed to be one that was sacred. The term was used in context with the way the place looks and makes the occupant feel in touch with God. Some of the descriptions of the preaching environment by the preachers were: “it’s an incredible environment for speaking, because you can see everybody,” “make it something hospitable, but something sacred and beautiful that make[s] them feel that they’re in touch with God,” “[if] it’s not self-sustainable.” Pastor Smith agreed adding, “I would like to be down a little lower so I’m looking at them as opposed to looking down on them.”

Pastor Thomas recounted his church’s need for renovation explaining, “the environment didn’t say that we were doing the most important work on the planet here,” “comfortable seats are a big deal,” “the pulpit sometimes acts as a barrier of making the speaker seem unapproachable,” and “it [fixed seating] hinders flexibility of use, of allowing the people to interact with one another.”

The eighth personal interview question the preachers were asked was a two-part question related to what they do for ongoing formation as a preacher and where they turn for input or feedback. All five preachers said that they read to continue developing as a preacher while only four of the five indicated that they attend conferences, retreats, or workshops. Two of the five preachers annually attend continuing education courses. Three of the five preachers turn to their wives to give them input on their preaching while four of the five preachers seek feedback from staff members and elders. I sought to further explore the area of professional development by asking the preachers if they have a mentor. Only one of the five preachers said he had a mentor even though several

implied they desired one. The only preacher with a mentor cited his father, a retired minister.

In the ninth personal interview question the preachers were asked was if there was anything else that I had not asked that they thought I should know about their experience delivering sermons. Each of the five preachers responded to the question. Two of the preachers wondered about the possibility of studying a related subject like the effects of age on the preacher's ability to connect with the congregation or if there was a connection between the décor and the responsiveness of a congregation. One of the other three preachers referred me to his study on prayer and how he believes that it had improved his preaching. Another preacher noted the influence that listening to other good preachers had on his preaching. He added that he wished he had more time to listen to other preachers and believed doing so would help his preaching. The fifth preacher declared himself to be a cynic of the traditional. He added that a change in the way we preach is needed in order to penetrate the listener's heart.

Some of the comments of the preachers on the topic of effective sermons were: "Understanding the adult learning style or whatever. Yeah. There's a very important part to that, but we've ignored it. We really have ignored it," "but that dissertation [on preaching] that I did was really helpful in my preaching," and "Quite frankly, I wish I would take more time to listen to more sermons just because that is...well, personally it feeds you, but, it also provides someone who will model an example for you."

Findings

I focused on the experience of churchgoing adults in listening to sermons. The research questions guided the study in exploring the possibility that adult learning, communication, and ambient teaching concepts might shed light on what makes a sermon effective. While the first research question delved into the experience of churchgoing adults, the second research question sought to uncover preachers' perceptions concerning the relationship that communication theory, namely relevance and immediacy, had on the effectiveness of their sermons. The third research question queried whether a disconnect between churchgoers and their preachers on what makes a sermon effective. The findings from the study are presented in the following paragraphs and tables.

After culling, coding, and tallying the frequency of responses of churchgoing adults and participating preachers, agreement was found on the elements that comprise effective sermons. In general, churchgoing adults articulated they believed many principles of adult learning as well as communication theory make a difference in the effectiveness of sermons. In contrast, there was little discussion or attention given by the participants to many of the concepts of ambient teaching and how they might be making a difference in how they hear sermons. The perceptions of preachers regarding the effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on the effectiveness of their sermons were mixed. There was an alignment of views of preachers and churchgoers on the topic of elements that comprise effective sermons. The top three elements in frequency from the pastors' interviews were found in the top five elements in frequency from the churchgoers' focus

groups with the top two elements being identical in both. An analysis of the data as related to the findings is found in the following paragraphs.

To better visualize the frequency of pastors' and churchgoers' perceived effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on effective sermons, I created two tables (Appendix K and L). Two additional frequency tables were created to show responses offered by participants when asked what comprises effective sermons, one from the churchgoers' focus group data and the other from the pastors' personal interview data. The entries in the tables were then arranged by the themes used to form the observation instruments. The data recorded during observations were crossed checked for consistency with the results from the frequency charting and subsequent conclusions. Participants' responses that corresponded to elements in the conceptual framework are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Elements of the Conceptual Framework Perceived to Make a Difference in Sermons
Arranged by Frequency of Response from Most to Least
Research Question # 1*

Communication Theory	Adult Learning Concepts	Ambient Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relating to the human condition - Presents a choice - Passion - Integrity - Preparedness - Practical in nature - Aspirational - Future usefulness - Humility - Being open/receptive - Emotional affectation - Use of stories - Contextually accurate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cause to analyze critically - Assist listeners with evaluating - A Climate of mutual respect - A Climate of mutual trust - Encouraged dialogue - Stories - Respect of faceneeds 	No consistent finding

Presentation of the Findings by Themes

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experience of churchgoing adults and pastors to understand how they perceive a sermon. Five pastors, 45 churchgoing adults were interviewed. Findings are presented using the themes that emerged during data analysis. An analysis of the data as related to the findings has been organized by the themes which emerged and is found in the following paragraphs.

Table 3 displays a comparison between the descriptors used by the churchgoing adults and the descriptors used by the preachers when describing effective sermons. The terms are listed from top to bottom in an arrangement that indicates frequency of response from most to least.

Table 3

*Comparison of Descriptors of Effective Sermons
Arranged by Frequency of Response from Most to Least
Research Question # 3*

Personal Interviews w/Pastors	Focus Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applicable - Challenging - Comprehensible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applicable - Challenging - Convicting - Inspiring - Comprehensible - Entertaining - Interesting - Informative - Compelling - Scriptural

Theme 1: Sermons Need to be Applicable

The first theme analyzed was the need for sermons to be informative, realistic, and relating to the human condition.

Applicable: informative. The focus group participants described the types of sermons that are meaningful to them as “informational,” “applicable,” as well as “enjoyable.” They anticipated the sermon message “to be full of knowledge but not overly scholarly,” an opportunity “to learn something new,” as well as “God’s Word that can be applied to their life today.” Wanda said, “One of the things is I like to learn something new. I don’t want you to preach at me; I want you to teach. Jesus didn’t preach at anybody – he taught, and that’s what I find easier to take away.” Jack added that he

wanted “to take the scripture context and make sure that I know it better because there are angles and understandings to what is being taught here, that I have not explored before.” Jed commented, “The way that the teaching is being presented is clarifying things for me, so that I understand scripture better and so that I understand context better in the word itself.” The churchgoers seemed to understand the difficulty the preacher has in bringing something new with each sermon but it is still a desired attribute as Fern clearly stated, “I’m looking for some new insight, after you’ve been in church for almost 40 years, there is not many new things you learn.”

Even though three of the five pastors expressed a desire for their congregations to learn more of the Bible and apply the sacred text to their lives, none of them described the intent of their preaching to teach the churchgoers something new or to aspire to make their sermons informative. Bill Jones alluded to the challenge of bringing something new each week by reporting, “I found that you can get stale very, very quickly, so I read a lot. I read a great deal.”

Applicable: realistic/doable. Churchgoers want sermons that fit into their lives and teach attainable goals and skills. Sometimes doable is related through sermons that are illustrated with real life stories about the preacher or someone that has experienced the difficulties in the real world. As Tina related, “Yeah, they're real people so if they can go through it, I can go through it.” Jim agreed with the need for practicality in declaring, “So this is a good lesson for me because of the fact that life application can be derived from it.” Wendy stated her appreciation for doable sermons commenting, “our priests do this often when they take the Gospel message and they relate it to our everyday life. That

even though this is something that happened years ago, that what Jesus preached about years ago, we can now use it in 2011.” The need for relevant and practical sermons for churchgoers was expressed as a priority by Sally who explained, “Today is where we live. God’s instruction for us today is the most important thing, and we take those applications and apply it.” John summed up the need for realistic sermons declaring, “An effective message is one that is doable.”

The pastors recognized the need for practicality in their sermons. Brother Smith makes doable a goal in his sermonizing as he explained, “Realistic, yes. That’s what I was looking for. It needs to have a measure of humor. It has to be illustrative and personable...in that same sense achievable.” Brother Franklin described sermon practicality as an equipping or “able to give them the nuts and bolts.”

Applicable: relates to human condition. Churchgoers expressed a need for sermons to address their everyday lives and relationships. They wanted to learn how to take steps to improve their relationships. Willow encouraged preachers to “Make a difference in my life. Give me a task that improves my life this week. Let me take something away from that that applies to my life today that I can become a better person.” Tabby enjoyed a recent sermon because as she explained, “I connected with it as well, I have kids. The adult churchgoers indicated that they benefited from sermons that connected the issues of their lives with stories of similar experiences of others. Wilda explained, “give me something I can apply today.” Faye could see herself in a recent sermon because, “everything that was being said ... happened in my life. And so I knew

there was both positive and negative sides of everything that he was saying and I could say, ‘Oh, yes, I’ve been there. I remember when, yeah, I had to walk that walk.’”

Preachers saw their congregations as people who struggle with sickness, connection, vision, investment, and inspiration. Despite that description of the human condition, they struggle to articulate the need for their sermons to connect in such a way that it addressed the universal need in the human experience. Some of the pastors simply described the churchgoers as “really good people” that “have some pretty screwed up situations.” However, Father Wilson did note the importance of staying connected to the everyday conditions that face his listeners, “different things...during the week, either in the news, real life stories, people’s personal experiences, maybe something that I had read. Anything..., may be incorporated... into a homily. I think [it is] very, very helpful ... to do that.”

Theme 2: Sermons Need to be Challenging

The second theme analyzed was the need for sermons to be engaging, inspiring, and compelling.

Challenging: engaging. One of the concepts brought up by at least four of the groups pertained to how the speaker could help them mentally work through ideas. The churchgoers appreciated the way a speaker assists the listeners with analyzing critically their values, beliefs, and conduct while evaluating outcomes and possible alternative courses of action. Waldo described this process by stating, “Basically he gave it back to us to figure out what we can do. It wasn’t a guilt issue, it was just a reality.” Joy liked the dialogue approach stating, “The lessons that get through the best to me are interactive...

rather than taking a spectator approach to things, being able to discuss things as we go.”

Tim agreed with Joy and referred to a certain desired tone, “a conversational style, not...that preachy tone” that aids dialogue. The participants emphasized the dynamic of the preacher simulating dialogue with them especially by the use of humor and stories.

Wayne believed everyone benefitted and loved humor stating, “I know at this parish, and probably everywhere, we love humor. But there is a lot of humor in what God does and they can bring that out.”

Tanya agreed with Wayne and compared the use of humor in sermons with the use of seasoning in cooking adding, “I also think a good mix of strength and seriousness with laughter and humor [are] like salt and pepper, they season one another.” Todd boldly proclaimed his need for a sermon to use humor by announcing, “for me I need the pastor to be humorous [is] important to me.”

The preachers expressed sensitivity to the engaged nature of their churchgoers but were sometimes left frustrated as Brother Smith reported, “The spiritual atmosphere, the engaged nature of the people... A lot of times you just get the feeling... most people would rather be watching football or taking a nap or something.” Pastor Thomas believed his listeners were being engaged by the way they responded to his use of humor and stories musing,

for the most part, I look out there, and I see people who are engaged, people who do laugh when I intend for them to laugh and people that do have that emotional response when I intend for them to have an emotional response, I do see a group of people that ... seems to connect well with me.

Challenging: inspiring. The notion that churchgoers desire to be challenged has an upbeat and uplifting aspect to it. Four out of the five focus groups explained their need to be challenged as a desire to be inspired. Faye revealed that one reason she goes to church is to have her opinion of God bolstered. She summarized, “To just to put it in a nutshell is I come to be wowed. I come to be in awe of my God. And to see God work in and through him [the preacher]– that’s why I’m there.” Whitney connected the idea of inspiring sermons with her need to be encouraged as well as convicted as she explained, “I want to be consoled and challenged in every homily. I want something to penetrate my heart so I can be more – I want it to purify me.”

Father Wilson clearly articulated how he desired his sermons to challenge and inspire his listeners by sharing, “Something sacred and something beautiful ... that make them feel that they’re in touch with God... when they come.” Even though two other preachers mentioned the need for sermons to be uplifting and challenging, Father Wilson was the only one who elevated the importance of inspiring adult churchgoers as, “The most important part is inspiring them, inspiring them to do something ... to change their lives.”

Challenging by being compelling. The need for a sermon to be challenging was stated by the participants in all five focus groups. They described a challenging sermon by its ability to compel listeners to change and indicated that they desired sermons that compel them to rethink their ideas and values and then be moved or convicted to change. Jack described a recent compelling sermon as,

Good for me because it allow[ed] me to compare the decisions that were made then with the decisions that I make today, and how they could be made by the leading of the Holy Spirit or by different influences, that kind of thing. So this is a good lesson for me because of the fact that life application can be derived from it. Todd agreed and added that he wanted a sermon “that challenges you gently and full of love but challenges you to improve yourself.”

The preachers in this study described an effective sermon as one which evokes actions such as being “compelled to change” and “people that will repent” or “to do something about what [they’ve] heard.” A challenging sermon was described by Pastor Thomas as, “[the people] are compelled to change, – compelled to do, compelled to be. So if people walk away from a Sunday morning, and they’re compelled to be different, then that’s effective.” Brother Franklin desires his sermons to be a catalyst for change musing, “Motivating, I guess before that I would put challenging... motivated by the challenge to move forward, to do something about what you’ve heard.” Pastor Thomas added that he not only wanted the sermon to be challenging and compelling but further wanted the sermon to be convicting. He saw effective sermons as ones he described as prompting “we want people to turn from sin flat out, a rebellious heart to be a receptive heart to Christ. We want a sinful mind to be changed. Change is an effective [sermon] – if people will change their behavior, repentance.”

Theme 3: Sermons Need to be Comprehensible

The third theme analyzed was the need for sermons to be focused, memorable, and organized.

Comprehensible by being focused. A focused sermon was described by focus groups as an effective sermon where one clear message was delivered with simplicity and brevity and free of distractions. Waldo expressed some frustration as he discussed the need for focused sermons sharing “Give me one strong thought for today” Winnie agreed with Waldo imploring preachers to be “Clear to the point about your message, and practice ... what I’m leaving with you this week to work on.” Brevity was mentioned by three of the focus groups as a quality that focused sermons possess.

Wayne was noticeably agitated by a recent experience listening to sermons in which he described the need for brevity recalling, “the same thing was said, in detail, four times. You have to know what you’re gonna say, you have to say it, and you have to do it right the first time.”

A focused sermon was also described by two of the focus groups as one that is simple enough to understand. Preachers were encouraged to bring the message to the level of their listeners. Simon explained, “I heard a lot of pastors get up there and use a lot of big words and they don’t explain them. They don’t bring it down to me and you, to the average person.” Teri noticed and appreciated simplicity in her preacher sharing, “he definitely talks on a level that is understood by everyone.”

Another facet of effective sermons that churchgoing adults described as focused pertained to the environment in which the sermon was preached. Some of the concepts of ambient teaching were seen as contributing factors to creating a focused environment. The optimal teaching environment according to the focus groups were ones which were free of furnishings that create barriers to emotional connection, possess beauty with

simplicity, encourage intimacy and inclusiveness. The need to reduce noisy distractions was mentioned by two of the focus groups. Participants expressed a concern that the distraction from babies crying is not necessarily a main concern. Fern cautioned,

Just a little bit too overdone with being distracted by babies crying because that's a part of life and I feel like we need to learn to overlook those kinds of things. To me what's much more annoying is cell phones going off than babies crying.

Sean supported Fern's notion adding that he was disturbed by people who talk during the worship service...while he's trying to preach."

Preachers saw the need for focused sermons. The only description of "focused" that they offered was a sermon that was simple enough to be understood. Father Wilson stated, "the effectiveness is simplicity and something that they can understand and makes a lot of sense to them and has meaning for them." The preachers were concerned that listeners would not understand or get the message from their sermons. Pastor Thomas shared,

I don't want them to go away going, 'I don't understand.' The worst thing for me would be for somebody to walk away and say, 'I didn't get what he was talking about.' So I work real hard at just being very relevant, very applicable to the situation.

Bill Jones expressed the need for the preacher to be able to read his audience stating, "You see understanding in their eyes. In our situation where we have a much more intimate group, it comes back and forms a question, 'Wait a minute. I don't understand.'" Father Wilson offered a measure for the simplicity of a sermon stating, "if I can

summarize the homily in one or two sentences, and then be able to elaborate on that in the homily, I think that's really effective, something very, very simple, but something that really connects to their lives."

Comprehensible by being memorable. Both the focus group participants and the preachers agreed on the need for the sermon to be memorable to be effective. Churchgoing adults expressed an appreciation for the way visuals helped them remember the sermon. Fitz confessed, "I tend to be visual and so the sermons leave a picture in my mind. This morning [the preacher] used a triangle on the Power Point, and [the ideas] will stick with me." Tim also liked visuals explaining, "the visual stuff really helps too because it brings in more ... [so] you can understand it." Willow found that stories increased her ability to remember the message as she explained, "I do like when they tie in stories because I can remember stories."

The preachers viewed visuals and narratives as important to reinforce the message of their preaching as well as to help the listeners remember its main ideas. Father Wilson advocated using stories in sermons because in his opinion, "real life stories are really crucial so that they can remember them, and they can hang onto those stories." Pastor Thomas uses props and sets to give his audience context and hopes these elements will support the message in his preaching. His strategy he described as, "Depending on the series, we'll customize our set to reinforce that message. So we did a series one time, or we built like a living room environment on the stage. We try to reinforce some of these things visually with our technology."

Comprehensible by being organized. The churchgoers stated that sermons that were organized helped them learn and were more interesting. The organization they desired included sermons that had an interesting introduction, a summary conclusion, and some sort of outline that they could follow along as the message progressed. To Faye organized sermons create a circle as she explained, “one of the things I like about pastor’s preaching is he always has some interesting introduction. But then at the end he always comes full circle.” Sacha agreed and added her appreciation for detail organization explaining that she liked how “the pastor outlines or just how he does his sermons.” Shea not only appreciated sermons which were presented with outlines but he suggested that the outlines helped him remember the message. He exclaimed, “I think it’s great when the points are outlined because it helps you ...focus your attention on each of the points and have a *retainage* to it.” Tanya, a high school teacher, connected the practice of preaching with that of teaching explaining, teaching and preaching go hand in hand. So the best practices for teaching are the best practices for preaching and vice versa.”

None of the preachers discussed the importance of a practical outline, clearly stated objectives, or the need for a clear cut introduction and conclusion. Brother Franklin, the youngest of the preachers, was the only one who expressed an interest in the mechanics of putting together a sermon.

Theme 4: Sermons Need to be Authentic

The fourth theme analyzed was the need for sermons and the preachers who give them to be passionate, compassionate, and trustworthy. The churchgoing adults had a

clearly defined picture of what the character of the preacher needs to be for them to “buy in” to what he has to say. The most important attribute for preachers expressed by all five focus groups was authenticity.

Authentic by being passionate. An essential element to a preacher’s delivery of effective sermons relates to his nonverbal passion. Simply put, churchgoers stated they could not get excited about a sermon from a preacher who was not excited about the sermon they were delivering.

All five focus groups wanted a sermon that was preached with passion. They expressed a belief that the passion of the preacher in his delivery reflected on the authenticity and sincerity of the preacher and his message. Passion was related as a very important aspect of effective sermon making. Jed excitedly proclaimed, “I like the intensity and the passion that is brought into it,” while Sean cautioned, “We’ve all heard the same ole same ole. You’ve got to have something from the pastor’s heart.” Wayne related his belief that preachers who are too tied to their notes often lack passion, recounting, “I went to that same mass and I found that it was refreshing to see someone speak from the heart and not from a piece of paper. So often they just read notes that they’ve written; this was truly from the heart today; there was no question about it.” Flint suggested that passion is contagious stating, “sometimes you can clearly tell it stirs the pastor’s emotion. He’s very passionate about it and it generates interest.” Simon discounted the value of sermons when they lack passion declaring, “if you start the sermon with a couple of really boring, low tone and you go into just somebody talking and he doesn’t have a fire in him, he just goes up there and he talks, there’s nothing in it.”

Even though I observed that each of the five preachers delivered their messages with passion and some with much passion, only one of the preachers mentioned passion as a necessary element of effective sermons. Brother Smith explained, “You’ve got to believe what you’re talking about. When you raise your voice you can sound passionate, but if you don’t really believe it, a lot of time folks can pick up and catch it, especially young people.” Perhaps the preachers in this study assumed that passion was inherent in preaching because they did not discuss the topic.

Authentic by being compassionate, open, approachable. The churchgoing adults in each of the focus groups indicated that they desired preachers who are open and humble with an ability to create an environment of community and connection. Tabby explained, “There’s some element for me of the community, the communal aspect of it. Wendy described what she sensed in her preacher stating, “I’ll tell you, he makes people feel included and important. That’s important to people.” The way the preacher talked to the churchgoers was as important as what he was saying. Tina explained the need for “talking with you not talking at you.” Teri stressed the need for the preacher to be friendly positing, “So having that *personableness* and the connection with the audience is very important.” Tanya added the value of the preacher “being open with his own life.” Felix agreed and explained, “I think that when the Pastor starts out by saying, “I have problems with this,” just the same as everybody else as far as – for me that makes it seem like he’s just like me and he’s not a superhero or something that we can’t achieve.”

Participants in the focus groups liked when the preacher used humor and other techniques to demonstrate humility and openness. Tex liked his preacher’s humor

commenting, “his humor is very varied and it’s self deprecating which...makes him more approachable.” Fern was sensitive to too many personal pronouns adding, “Not today, but sometimes I’m distracted by a lot of “I’s or personal pronouns if he’s so focused on himself.” Several participants noted how the preacher could use the learning space to create immediacy. Tina thought the preacher’s message was enhanced by his moving closer to the listeners and urged, “come down and be amongst the people.” Wenona described how proximity affected her attentiveness stating, “when they’re away from that podium and they actually come out to the congregation, they got me.” Tabby added, “just the physical...the big podium and the robes ... just kind of makes you think they’re supposed to be this [untouchable] above you person [but the preacher is] just another one of us but you’re helping us learn.” Wilda credited the physical environment for enhancing the preaching stating, “we have a beautiful worship space that really was designed for that. I mean that everything is inclusive and it’s simplified...an environment of prayer and worship.”

The preachers interviewed recognized a need for connection and echoed the churchgoers call for strengthening immediacy by removing barriers and enhancing proximity. Bill Jones highlighted the need for openness stating, “Vulnerability and relationship have been a major part of that process you can see. And I think that’s true. If they don’t like you, they’re not going to listen to you.” Father Wilson added, “Connect with them. There’s no separation between you and them. When you create an environment like that, you try to make it hospitable, welcoming, and belonging.” The impact that a relationship with the preacher on the effectiveness of a sermon was

explained by Bill Jones as “The people who are invested in you, who are sitting on the edge of their chair, and they’re expecting and they want to see and...hear something.”

All five preachers interviewed articulated a concern that the learning environment might not be as conducive as it could be due to proximity concerns. Pastor Thomas noted, “that little outcropping [gives me place] to be a little bit more close.” Brother Franklin added, “I like to be down a little lower so I’m more looking at them as opposed to looking down on them.” Pastor Thomas mused, “The length of our room might create kind of an invisible barrier.” Brother Smith theorized, “the overall setup, the configuration of everything is counterproductive to good communication. It separates the speaker from the audience. I think the pulpit sometimes acts as a barrier of making the speaker seem unapproachable.”

Authentic by being trustworthy. The desired character of the preacher is one that was described as “someone who had integrity and was prepared.” The need for trust was articulated and discussed in some detail by four of the five focus groups. Faye explained the need for trust as, “There has to be an element of trust between the preacher and you as a member of the congregation. Without that established trust, I don’t know that I wouldn’t feel like – there’s not a whole lot that he has to say to me that I would hear.” Fern highlighted the preacher’s consistency positing, “Personally I don’t look so much for dynamics in the person. I look more for consistency. And this is for me, I look more for consistency in testimony and lifestyle and in preaching and in the way they interact with me.” Sacha countered the notion of character being a necessary element in effective sermons by exclaiming, “I know. I love him as a person, I mean that’s where

you all don't have to convince me of that. But I believe that the Lord can take any old wild man off the street and deliver a beautiful message through him." Felix wanted a preacher to be prepared and he claimed, "He's got to be studious, too. You can tell when ...whether it was off the cuff or [came from] lots of preparation." Connecting the preparedness of the preacher with the sermon's impact Julie declared, "if I don't see learnedness or if they come across as not knowing what they're talking about, then I'm not likely to be challenged by anything they say."

Even though churchgoing adults place preparedness as a key element for adding relevance to a sermon, preachers did not mention it in any of the five interviews. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the need for integrity either. Father Wilson did mention comments from churchgoers about his preparedness recalling, "Well, you can really tell that you thought about that a lot." The closest any personal interview came to the discussion of integrity was when Brother Smith asserted, "For most, the audience has to have a measure of respect and/or interest in the speaker. They have to care [about] what he has to say. I think he has to be in like manner, concerned about his hearer's understanding of what he says. An effective message is a two way street unless the hearer is receptive and the speaker is concerned, communication has not taken place."

Summary

This section included findings from the qualitative study as well as a profile of its participants. The data presented in this section were aligned according to the research questions. The research questions were:

1. In the experience of churchgoing adults, how do the principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching make a difference in the effectiveness of sermons?
2. What perceptions do preachers have about the effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on the effectiveness of their sermons?
3. How do the views of preachers and churchgoers align on the topic of elements that comprise effective sermons?

The focus group and interview responses were analyzed to discover if preachers were aware of components of effective sermons. The questions used as discussion guides for the personal interviews as well as the focus groups were crafted to illicit responses to answer the research questions. The focus group and personal interview responses were similar and were supported by my observations. The importance of sermons being applicable and challenging was consistently repeated themes among all participants.

Section 5 includes interpretation of the findings in light of the literature review conducted in this study, recommendations, conclusions, and the contribution to positive social change that may result from the study.

Section 5: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this section, I will present interpretations of the findings in my study as they relate to the conceptual framework and literature review of the study. The concepts of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching formed the framework for this study on effective preaching. Implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research will be included along with some reflections on my research experience.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of preachers and their listeners in order to better understand the elements needed to make preaching to adult listeners effective. The research questions and interview guides were crafted to discover concepts relating to adult learning and communication theory that may increase the effectiveness of sermons. While researchers have stressed the need to facilitate adult learning through understanding the uniqueness of the adult learner, a gap in the literature was found in specific suggestions directly related to preaching (Brookfield, 1986; Lai, 1995; Murugiah, 2005). The gap overlaps in the local practice of preachers in many churches in the United States who are not aware of adult learning and communication concepts that could enhance their ability to inspire and educate their listeners. This gap may be connected to whether preachers embrace the role of being an adult educator.

The research design was used to integrate research on preaching with research on teaching to better understand what makes preaching, a form of lecturing, effective for adult listeners. Due to the multidimensional nature of preaching, I restricted my focus to

the teaching aspect of preaching to adults while leaving other aspects, such as spirituality and maturity in the listeners, untouched.

The qualitative case study design used in this study included focus groups with church-going adults and personal interviews with preachers along with onsite observations for data collection. I focused on the perceptions and experiences of church-going adults at their churches, thus supporting a qualitative research design (Knowles, 1984). The participants involved fit the description of consistent church-going adults, that is, adults who attended church services on a weekly basis. Interviews with pastors were used to probe their experiences concerning their training, perceptions of the congregants, and their views on the elements that comprise an effective sermon. The focus groups and personal interviews were conducted face-to-face in an effort to capture a description of the participants' experiences. Interviews and focus groups, while they are the source of indirect information, also provided a description of the participants' experience while giving me an opportunity to probe the historical context (Creswell, 2009). The findings were analyzed with an understanding that I only addressed techniques in the presentation of content, not the spiritual condition or maturity of the participants. Qualitative data analysis was conducted with a focus on statements made by participants and descriptions of their experiences.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

Question 1 guided my exploration into the experiences of churchgoing adults and what they would say when asked what helps them learn from sermons. The interpretation of the data taken in the study to answer the first research question will be discussed in relation to the three concepts forming the conceptual framework.

Adult Learning

Lai (1995) stated that preaching is a type of lecture that implicitly teaches listeners to be passive in a teacher-centric method without student interaction or dialogue. Even though only two focus groups out of the five mentioned the concept of dialogue by use of the specific term, all of the groups made reference to the need for interaction via dialogue. Participants of the focus groups described the use of questions and stories as a way to create a climate of collaboration which Stangway (2004) described as dialogue. In my observation of sermons for this study, the absence of questions as well as stories and visuals was noteworthy, lending credence to the need for adult learning theory to be understood and embraced by preachers.

Participants agreed with Knowles (1984) that the adult learner needs a psychological climate of not only collaboration but also of mutual trust and respect. Participants in all five focus groups affirmed their need for such a climate with *trust* being a word repeatedly mentioned throughout each discussion. The description of a climate of mutual respect was further defined in four of the five focus groups by the way the preacher talks to them. The participants desired a preacher who communicated his

perception of them as competent, belonging, and autonomous which are face-needs that Kersson-Griep (2001) encouraged be met.

I found that church-going adults believe an effective sermon is one that causes them to reflect critically empowering them to make responsible decisions which Vogel (1984) said is a function of Christian religious education. Preaching was described as not only learning but transformational because the listener is prompted to reconsider social and cultural norms (Carter, 2009; Mezirow, 1991). Knowles (1980) listed the functions of the teacher of adults as diagnostic, motivational, and evaluative which were mentioned by the participants in this study when they described the need for a sermon to be convicting. The data supported Knowles's (1984) view of adult learners being self-directed learners who desire a clear introduction and organization that informs them of where the lesson might take them. Church-going adults used the terms challenging, applicable, convicting, and inspiring to describe sermons which present a disorienting dilemma that Mezirow (1991) described as creating disequilibrium. This disequilibrium results in a new perspective yielding new skills that churchgoing adults can reintegrated into their lives.

Communication Theory

Church-going adults articulated how concepts relating to communication theory affect the way they process thoughts, data, and feelings (Hybels & Weaver, 2007). Much of the discussion by the focus groups in the study pertained to two concepts, immediacy and relevance, which have been the focus of some of the earliest studies on communication theory (Anderson, 1979; McCroskey et al., 2002). The terms immediacy and relevance are defined as a connection between the speaker and the listener where the

former is an emotional connection and the latter being an intellectual or practical connection.

Relevance. I found that the relevance of a sermon is affected by not only what is being said in the content of sermon but also who is saying it and what is the content of their character (Furman, 1992; Morgan, 2002; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). Adult church-goers desire sermons that are not only accurate or precise but also applicable and practical so that they function more competently in some area of their lives (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). Sermons described as possessing this quality of applicableness were described as realistic, doable, and tangible. The participants also suggested a desire for sermons to challenge their values and perspectives with four of the five focus groups adding the word *conviction* to the concept. The participants wanted conviction in the sense of wanting to be shown a better way through new information which would lead them to change their behavior (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 1991) rather than to provide a negative stimulus to extinguish bad behavior (Wertheim, 2000). One relevance concept that did not garner enough comments to be placed on the high-frequency list of responses was the need for sermon brevity. The subject was raised in only three of the groups with only one of the groups showing much enthusiasm for the subject even though Carlson (2001), Oermann (2004), and Luntz (2007) suggested brevity as an important aspect of an effective lecture. Another concept that was not unanimously discussed but received attention was the organization of a sermon. As shown by Butler (1992) and suggested by Carlson (2001), the participants affirmed that the use of a well organized outline having a clear introduction and conclusion enhanced their learning.

The adult church-goers in this study agreed that a description of relevance included the context of the preacher's character (Morgan, 2002; Strangway, 2004; Warren, 2007). The participants suggested a preacher's character should be one of authenticity and integrity. Other clarifying terms were mentioned such as humility, friendly, receptive, passionate, bold, and animated. The character of the preacher lends to his/her credibility which Brookfield (1990) perceived as being paired with authenticity to form the two components to trustworthiness. I found that the preparedness of the preacher was also linked to his/her character which Brookfield connected to the preacher's competence and trustworthiness.

Immediacy. Communication is not only the sharing of thoughts and information; it is also the sharing of feelings (Hybels & Weaver, 2007). Feelings are shared in verbal and nonverbal methods and can connect a preacher to the listener (Simmons, 2007). Every focus group participant in this study stated a desire for sermons from a preacher that would leave him or her inspired and hopeful in the spiritual life. I found that the inspiring attribute of the sermon was closely connected to the degree that the sermon was clear and understandable. The use of big words and heavy theological terminology was mentioned as an impediment to comprehension. The use of stories, humor, and illustration were offered as ways the preacher could make sermons more understandable and meaningful, creating a common ground between the preacher and the listener (Olenowski, 2000). This common ground also creates a sense of dialogue where the preacher exudes confidence in the adult learners and their ability to learn new knowledge that will be helpful to them (Vella, 1994). Participants described this concept of dialogue

as a desire for the speaker to talk with them and not at them. I also found that the use of nonverbal immediacy also contributes to the effectiveness of sermons. The focus groups unanimously supported the desire for the preacher to demonstrate passion or enthusiasm for the message being delivered. Morgan (2002) indicated that dynamic preaching from passionate persuaders makes for memorable sermons that connect with listeners. Several of the focus groups commented on the benefit of having the preacher move out from behind the pulpit and get closer to the listeners. Simmons (2007) supported proximity as a means of building community and increasing immediacy between the preacher and the churchgoers.

Ambient Teaching

There were little data taken in the study that informed described aspects of ambient teaching as affecting the effectiveness of sermons. If environmental features are as important as White (1972) claimed in estimating that it affects 25 % of learning, then perhaps a greater volume of data could have been taken by using different questions in the discussion guide. Most of the ambient issues that participants commented on were visual in nature. Participants noted the need for simple but appropriate colors and décor as well as the benefit of any other form of visual enhancement that would support the preaching. Spacing concerns were discussed in context to the ability to see the speaker as well as other listeners during the context of the sermon delivery. The pulpit and platform from which the preacher speaks were said to be a potential barrier to the listeners' feeling of intimacy and inclusion, perhaps creating a status distinction referred to by Colanuno (2007). Babies crying and adults talking during the sermon were noted by participants as

common hindrances found in the physical learning environment. The need for restrooms nearby where the learning takes place may have been overlooked due to all five of the sites for the study being equipped with adequately located restrooms.

Research Question 2

This question guided my exploration into the experiences of preachers and what they would say when asked what factors, elements, and techniques aid their message. The interpretation of the data taken in the study to answer the second research question will be discussed in relation to the two concepts, relevance and immediacy, forming the communication portion of conceptual framework.

Relevance

All five preachers acknowledged the need for relevancy in their sermons. They also all agreed that effective sermons are those which are practical in nature and challenge their listeners to change. Even though the preachers posited the need to challenge listeners to change, in my observation of sermons, only two sermons issued a challenge and only one preacher used the term *sin* in his sermon or during personal interviews. Staying current on trends and events or, as Strangway (2004) described as being a student of culture, was offered by three of the preachers as a way to stimulate relevancy in sermon preparation. Three of the preachers cited preparedness as a concern in their effort to create relevant sermons that tie into the concerns, hopes, and dreams of the listeners. Although the use of a well organized outline with an introduction and conclusion as well as some kind of visual enhancement were offered by Carlson (2001)

as two techniques to increase relevance in sermons, only two of the preachers affirmed the potential of visuals and none made any mention of the efficacy of outlines.

Immediacy

The preachers participating in this study agreed with the assertion of McCroskey et al. (2002) that nonverbal immediacy affects cognitive learning and promotes favorable outcomes in learners. All five pastors recognized the need for their listeners to see them as friendly, open, and receptive. Olenowski (2000) posited that immediacy can be increased by the development and exercise of a group of skills by those who preach. From the findings of the data from the interviews and observation of the preachers, I found that there is a gap in the understanding and mastery of such skills by some clergy. Only two of the preachers acknowledged eye contact, passion, use of illustrations, or humor as important aspects of connecting emotionally with their listeners. Three of the preachers reflected the assertion of Morgan (2002) that it is the preacher's responsibility to deliver the message in a manner that connects to inspire the listener. The preachers all affirmed the importance of proximity in communicating immediacy to their listeners (McCroskey et al., 2002; Simmons, 2007). Some concerns noted by the preachers included the size and shape of the platform, size of the pulpit, the distance between the back pew and the pulpit, and ease of movement from behind the pulpit toward the congregation.

Research Question 3

The sixth question on the interview guides for the personal interviews with preachers as well as the focus groups queried the participants as to what they believed

comprise effective sermons. The interpretations of that data as well as data taken from the sum of the research for the study are included in the following paragraphs.

The preachers and church-going adults participating in this study agreed the purpose of preaching is to challenge the individual's thinking, ideals, feelings, and living (Foltz, 1990; Palmer, 1932; Vogel, 1984). I found that both groups of participants affirm preaching to be a critical discourse on subjects relevant to them that are reflective of social norms and cultural codes as Mezirow (1991) described. There was unanimous agreement on the importance of a sermon being applicable and challenging. Preachers were unclear or inarticulate in describing how to formulate such sermons. It is this methodological function of adult educators that Knowles (1980) described as teachers who make decisions and selections concerning teaching techniques and methods to create conditions conducive to transformative learning. The church-goers would inform the preacher that the methodology should include not only elements of relevancy but also immediacy as well as some adult learning concepts. The preacher is encouraged to use illustration, humor, storytelling, and self-disclosure to create an emotional connection with the listeners (Olenowski, 2000). The focus group participants expressed a desire to be uplifted or inspired by a message leaving them feeling closer to God. Church-goers advocated the use questions, individual experience, or dialogue to present a disorienting dilemma causing the listener to analyze critically their values (Mezirow, 1991). The role of the preacher's character in the effectiveness of sermons was seen as substantial by the focus groups. Preachers in the study made few if any comments, mainly on the need for friendliness, on the impact of their character on their sermons. Conversely, church-goers

expressed the character qualities of authenticity, compassion, and being nonjudgmental as crucial to the success of sermons.

An Interpretive Summary

In summary, the participants told me that not only do the sermons need certain qualities in order to be effective but also the preacher must possess certain qualities to be effective. An effective sermon was described as applicable and challenging which are terms describing concepts that are important for adult learners. An effective sermon is also inspiring, engaging, and comprehensible, all of which are components of communication theory. The effective preacher is relational and trustworthy which demonstrate respect and support which are important concepts for adult learners. The effective preacher demonstrates integrity, emotional affectiveness, passion all of which underscore aspects communication theory concepts.

Implications for Social Change

This study contributes to positive social change because the outcomes can influence the way Bible colleges, communicators, congregants, and communities of faith perceive and perform preaching. Bible colleges may strengthen their curriculum for training preachers that would include adult learning concepts. Preachers and other adult educators who embrace the outcomes of the study might find increased sensitivity to their congregants' need for a healthy relationship with their teacher. I assumed that if speakers understand the key elements and practices that make up effective sermons, they may change the way they lecture and potentially stimulate a life change in their listeners (Mezirow, 1991). The preacher may find an increased awareness and appreciation of the

influence of his or her character upon his listeners thereby strengthening the desire to be a good model of the behavior being taught. Teachers of adults in the church and outside of the church environments that embrace the outcomes of the study can be more confident and constructive by challenging the values, actions, and beliefs of their students.

While I focused on a religious or faith-based topic, the emphasis was on the skills and characteristics that can be employed in order to achieve desired results in all adult learning via lecture as well as in preaching (Brookfield, 1987; Merriam, 1991). It is hoped that congregants in particular and adult learners in general will have teachers who respect their uniqueness as adults and will be encouraged by the sensitivity of teachers who understand and work within their face-needs.

The relationship of the congregants with their preacher will be enriched as the preacher embraces the important dynamic of that connection to the effectiveness of their preaching. The outcomes of the study might inform church-goers in search of a church or a church in search of a preacher regarding necessary understanding and criteria of practice in preaching that is desired. Communities can be strengthened by church-goers and preachers who are being challenged to live out the principles of sacred texts. Transformative religious education can enhance the community by educational opportunities in which the churchgoing citizens will be challenged to critically consider values such as equality, justice, democracy and freedom (Mezirow, 1991).

Recommendations for Action

Based on the results of this study, I recommend disseminating the findings of what churchgoers expressed as needed for preachers across the United States by way of

seminars, workshops, and publications. As one of the churchgoers explained, “they need to hear what are we thinking in the pews” (Female, St. Appositus Church). Second, I recommend that seminaries and pastor training organizations enrich their curriculum to include techniques to stimulate dialogue in preaching through questions, stories, humor, illustration, and visuals. A new curriculum for preachers should address issues relating to teaching which are age specific, that is, for preaching to adult learners, and should be fortified with concepts of transformative learning as well as communication theory in an effort to motivate them to be critically reflective of their previously held ideas (Mezirow, 2005). It should emphasize the positive effects on the listener by increasing immediacy striking a collaborative tone which respects the adult listener’s face-needs and building mutual trust and respect (Kersson-Griep, 2001). Third, I recommend that preachers resolve to bring fresh insights and information which will encourage critical analysis leading to disequilibrium and finally transformational learning. Such encouragement towards critical analysis was appreciated by one churchgoer who explained, “because it allows me to compare the decisions that were made then with the decisions that I make today, and how they could be made by the leading of the Holy Spirit or by different influences” (Male, Streams of Mercy Church). Fourth, I recommend that preachers embrace their role as adult educators and commit to lifelong professional development becoming educational practitioners who are always seeking new ways to connect with their congregation. Fifth, I recommend seminaries develop a rubric or matrix to teach and measure a sermon’s utilization of relevance and immediacy techniques that could serve the students throughout their ministry career.

Recommendation for Further Study

In this study, I identified the elements of sermons that adult churchgoers need in order for them to experience transformational learning. Further study is needed to delve into how these elements can be cultivated and incorporated specifically into sermon making. Topics in the new approach could include the role of dialogue in a sermon. Because dialogue depends on the usage of words, I recommend that a study on the use of particular words in sermons be done to examine their emotional effect on the churchgoers. For example, students of sermons might learn to evaluate the words that should be used often, words that should be avoided or words that should be used cautiously. Further study is recommended to seek additional dimensions found in the data by analyzing and presenting themes found uniquely to a particular congregation and contrasting the findings with those of other congregations. I also recommend a study that considers more narrowly defined age groupings and their age-specific or developmentally specific needs when hearing sermons.

Researcher's Reflection

The experience with the research process gave me a greater appreciation for research in general and for findings of other studies as a whole. The process of formulating my proposal with the guidance of my committee strengthened my ability to lay aside bias that I might have had. It was through that process that I feel I gained the perspective to set aside my sectarian dogma in order to collect a greater amount of relevant data and to arrive at more precise and reliable findings. As researcher, I was overwhelmed with the task of keeping track of the data from five focus groups, five

personal interviews with pastors, as well as observation notes. It was really amazing how much data can be collected in a short visit to a site. The participants in the study were more than gracious and were a wonderful encouragement to me as a preacher. The participants validated my interest in the study by telling me that they come to church to learn but also to be changed by the message. One male participant from Stream of Mercy Church stated, “And of the teaching, it is not the goal of teaching, teaching is actually to change us in some way. Instead of just becoming more smart, we become different people.” My effect on the participants was to provide some validation for their ideas and feelings about their experience listening to sermons. Several participants thanked me for allowing them to be a part of the study and believed it would have beneficial results for their church and the religious community at large. It was surprising to find the personality and characteristics of the preacher to be so fundamental to the effectiveness of sermons. While I thought personality and preacher characteristics were important, I did not feel that they would be mentioned as often or with such clarity as it did in the focus group discussions.

Conclusion

Even though focus group participants shared 98 different descriptive terms for effective sermons, the key element identified was the preacher. It is the personality, character, words, and techniques of the preacher that creates the learning environment. The key to effective sermon making is found in how the preacher creates an environment of mutual respect and trust that leads the listener to consider the new information that challenges their everyday values, beliefs, and conduct. Immediacy is foundational in the

listener being engaged with the preacher in the learning process. Preachers, who have rich relationships with their church-goers, are careful in their choice of emotionally charged words, and employ immediacy techniques in their preaching that engage the listener and enliven dialogue. The preacher must see himself or herself as an adult educator. If preachers will explore and utilize the concepts from adult learning and communication theory, they will see transformational learning taking in the lives of their adult listeners. Churchgoers want their values challenged in sermons where the sacred texts are critically discussed along with consistency in living according to the principles found therein. Preachers can change the way they preach to stimulate a life change in their listeners.

This study has improved our understanding of adult education principles and practices by discovering descriptive terms that adult learners use when describing what they need in order to learn. The data reinforce the idea that adults are avid learners and want not only to learn but to be challenged to change. The study also contributes to our understanding of the theory guiding this study by describing the desirable characteristics of the adult teacher. The findings have given a description of what constitutes authenticity of the adult teacher.

The study was intended to give preachers a better understanding of what churchgoing adults need to help them learn from preaching. Results from the study concluded that preachers are aware of many essential elements of sermons while being unclear on other important dynamics. Church-going adults need sermons to be applicable,

challenging, and comprehensible. They also desire their preachers to be authentic, passionate, genuine, compassionate, and prepared.

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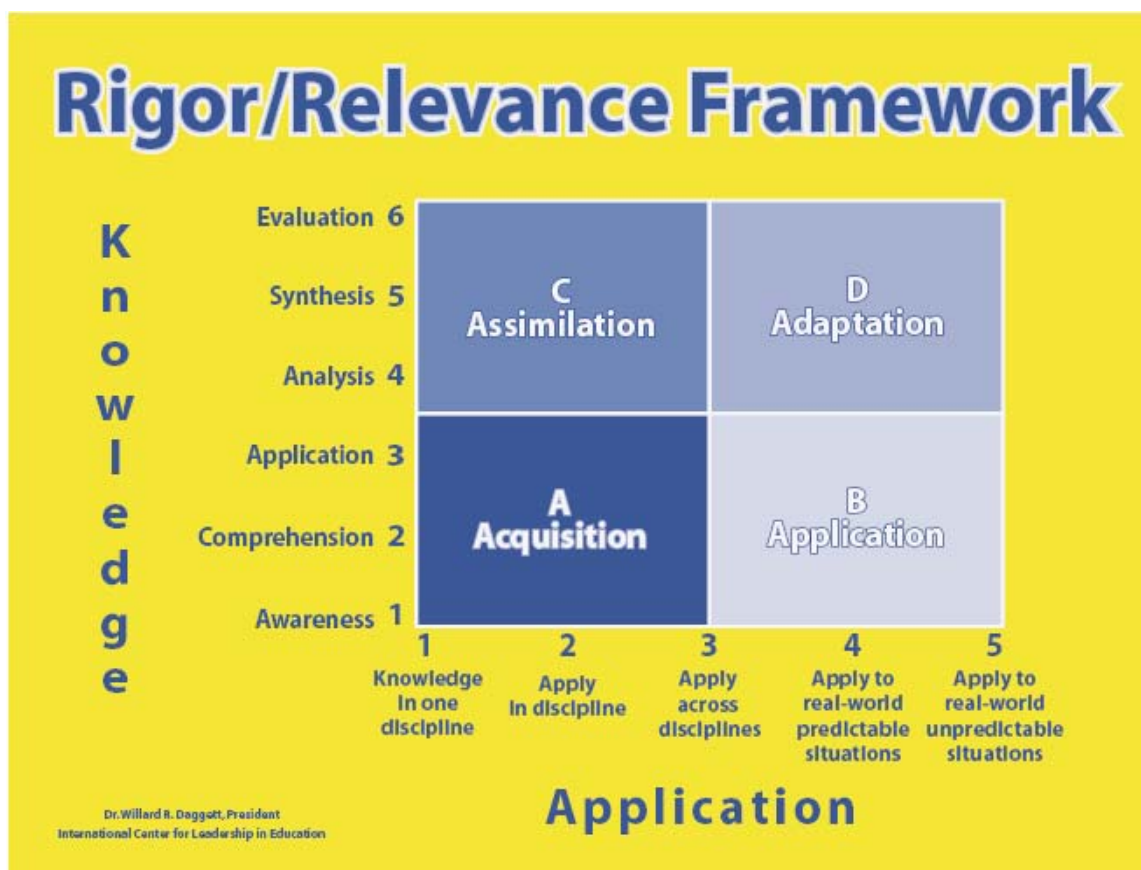
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Appendix A: Rigor/Relevance Framework



Used by permission of the International Center for Leadership in Education

Hi Randall,

You are welcome to use the R&R Framework in addition to other materials and resources produced by the International Center - Just be sure to give proper credit to Dr. Daggett and any additional author(S) you may choose to use as you mentioned below. Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions or concerns. Thank you.

Stacy Girmindl

Winter Leadership Academy
January 28-30, 2011
San Diego, CA
www.leadered.com/LeadershipAcademy

-----Original Message-----

From: Randall
Sent: Tuesday, January 11, 2011 5:03 PM
To: Icle Info
Subject: Request for permission to use Rigor/ Relevance Framework in Dissertation

Dear International Center for Leadership in Education,

My name is Randall DeVille and I am an Ed.D. student with Walden University. I would love to include your Rigor/Relevance Framework in my study. Would you allow me to include the attached graphic in my dissertation? I will be sure to give proper citation and credit to the International Center for Leadership in Education.

Thank you for your consideration,

Randall C. DeVille

Randall C. DeVille
God is Good All the Time
II Tim 1:7

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

A Denominational Church
P.O. Box 12345
Anywhere, USA 67890
Church Office Phone: (123) 456-7890

Date: January 16, 2011

Dear Mr. Randall DeVille,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Effective Preaching within the A Denominational Church campus. As part of this study, I authorize you to (a) observe a Sunday morning worship service, (b) conduct a focus group consisting of 8 churchgoers, and (c) to interview the pastor who preaches during your visit. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Dr. Pastor
Minister

Appendix C: Consent Form: Focus Groups

You are invited to take part in a research study to better understand the experience of churchgoers and to better recognize what is needed to urge them towards change.

You were chosen for the study because you have been identified by the researcher as a churchgoing adult whose experience listening to sermons is being studied. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Randall C. DeVille, who is a doctoral student at Walden University and Senior Pastor of Somewhere Baptist Church in Colorado. I am the researcher for this study. I will be asking you to participate in a focus group that will discuss your experiences while listening to sermons.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to help this researcher and other preachers to become more effective preachers.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a focus group that will be audio recorded lasting no longer than 60 minutes where you share your experiences and perspectives.
- Invest up to 60 minutes to check the accuracy of the session transcript and to correspond with the researcher about his conclusions.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions or discussion topics that you feel are too sensitive or personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There risks to this study are minimal. The benefit would be that your participation and input may help preachers better understand the needs of adult churchgoers.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Randall C. DeVille. The researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Karin Treiber. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at 123-456-7890 or randall.deville@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-09-11-0055237** and it expires on **June 8, 2012**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

☐ I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant

Participant's Written or
Electronic Signature

Researcher's Written or
Electronic Signature

Randall C. DeVille

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix D: Consent Form: Pastor Interviews

You are invited to take part in a research study to better understand the experience of churchgoers and to better recognize what is needed to urge them towards change.

You were chosen for the study because you have been identified as the preacher in a church that was recommended for this study because of its location. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Randall C. DeVille, who is a doctoral student at Walden University and Senior Pastor of Somewhere Baptist Church in Colorado. I am the researcher for this study. I will be asking you to participate in a personal interview that will discuss your experiences in preparing and delivering sermons.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to help this researcher and other preachers to become more effective preachers.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview that will be audio recorded lasting no longer than 60 minutes where you will be asked to share your experiences and perspectives.
- Invest up to 60 minutes total time on two processes: First, to check the accuracy of the transcript of your interview and second, to correspond with the researcher about his conclusions after he interprets the results of the interview.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions or discussion topics that you feel are too sensitive or personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There risks to this study are minimal. The benefit would be that your participation and input may help preachers better understand the needs of adult churchgoers.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Randall C. DeVille. The researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Karin Treiber.. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at 123-456-7890 or randall.deville@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-09-11-0055237** and it expires on **June 8, 2012**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

☐ I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant

Participant's Written or
Electronic Signature

Researcher's Written or
Electronic Signature

Randall C. DeVille

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Physical Learning Environment Assessment Tool

N/A = Not Applicable, NI = Needs Improvement, S = Satisfactory, E = Exemplary

Synaesthetics - Sensory Concerns

Physical Attribute	Church A	Church B	Church C	Church D	Church E
Attractive/appropriate colors and decorations					
Adequate lighting					
Absence of glare					
Lighting adequate for audiovisual devices					
Any noise to be reduced or eliminated					
Adequate acoustics					
Adequate sound amplification					
Adequate ventilation or air conditioning					
Temperature adequate for the season of the year					
Cafeteria/refreshment machines nearby					
Lavatory/Restrooms Nearby					
Adequate parking nearby					
Adequate lighting in parking area and building hallways					
Breakout rooms/areas available if needed					
Adequate lighting					

Anthropometry - Furnishing Concerns

Physical Attribute	Church A	Church B	Church C	Church D	Church E
Adjustable seats or alternative choices					
Adequate cushioning if used for long periods					
Can person's legs be crossed comfortably					
Straight back and flat pan for people with back problems					
Adequate sturdiness/sides					
Seat height from floor adequate					
Left-handed learner provided for					
Absence of ragged or sharp edges on all furnishings					
Adequate sturdiness for all furnishings					
Can learners see each other adequately when seated?					
If sitting at tables, can the learners cross their legs					
“All are Welcome” ADA features					
> Elevator, ramp, one level					
> Restrooms accessible					
> Water fountain access					
> Seating – “short pew”					

Proxemics - Spacing Concerns

Physical Attribute	Church A	Church B	Church C	Church D	Church E
Can furnishing be rearranged for small-group work or sociopetal needs (so learners can see each other)					
Table space available for refreshments/resources					
If learners sit at tables, can the tables be arranged in a square, circle or U-shape					
Seats can be easily moved around					
Adequate access/egress to and from site for learners					

Ergonomics - Comfort Concerns

Physical Attribute	Church A	Church B	Church C	Church D	Church E
Adequate signage to direct learners to appropriate sites					
Space of appropriate shape and adequate size in learning site					
Adequate table or writing space					
Does the learning site have flexibility and provide for learner movement if needed					

Appendix F: Communication Assessment Tool

Churches Observed

Qualities Observed (Yes/No)	A	B	C	D	E
RELEVANCY					
<u>Addresses Concerns, Hopes, Dreams:</u>					
<i>Macro:</i>					
World Peace					
Terrorism					
Employment					
Social Concerns					
<i>Micro:</i>					
Family					
Marriage					
Sin					
Spirituality					
Practical in Nature					
Future Usefulness					
Choice					
<u>Qualities of the Message:</u>					
<i>Clear cut Intro. & Conclusion</i>					
<i>Clearly stated objectives</i>					
<i>True to the text/context</i>					
<i>Clarity</i>					
<i>Visual enhancement</i>					

<i>Practical Outline (not technical)</i>					
<i>Presents Listener with Choice to make</i>					
<i>Optimal Length (30 minutes \pm 10 min.)</i>					
<u>Speaker's Character:</u>					
<i>Preparedness</i>					
<i>Humility</i>					
<i>Integrity</i>					
<i>Generosity</i>					
<i>Civility</i>					
<i>Student of the Culture</i>					

Qualities Observed (Yes/No)	A	B	C	D	E
IMMEDIACY					
VERBAL					
<u>Choice of Words:</u>					
<i>Simple</i>					
<i>Consistent</i>					
<i>Novel</i>					
<i>Sound and Texture</i>					
<i>Aspirational</i>					
Use of Questions					

<u>Choice of Content:</u>					
<i>Relating to the Human Condition</i>					
<i>Metaphor</i>					
<i>Illustration</i>					
<i>Humor</i>					
<i>Storytelling</i>					
<i>Self-disclosure</i>					

Qualities Observed (Yes/No)	A	B	C	D	E
NONVERBAL					
Smiles					
Proximity to Listeners					
Eye Contact					
Non-threatening touch					
Open & receptive body language					
Passion					
Emotional Affectation					
Persuasive					

Appendix G: Adult Learning Assessment Tool

Qualities Observed (Yes/No)	Churches Observed				
	A	B	C	D	E
<u>Dialogue encouraged by use of:</u>					
<i>Stories</i>					
<i>Questions</i>					
<i>Objects</i>					
Faceneeds acknowledgement					
<i>Autonomy</i>					
<i>Belonging</i>					
<i>Competence</i>					
Handouts					
<u>Speaker assisted listeners with:</u>					
<i>Analyzing critically their:</i>					
Values					
Beliefs					
Conduct					
<i>Evaluating</i>					
<i>Resource materials</i>					
<u>Message made use of:</u>					
<i>Critical Incident Exercises</i>					
<i>Crisis-Decision Simulations</i>					
<i>Critical Analysis</i>					
<u>Speaker created a climate of:</u>					
<i>Mutual respect</i>					
<i>Collaborativeness</i>					
<i>Mutual Trust</i>					
<i>Supportiveness</i>					

Appendix H: Interview Questions Guide

1. What are your goals for the congregation on a given Sunday?
2. How do you feel about the general comprehension of the congregation?
3. What did your training in preaching comprise? In other words, what courses or practical experience did you receive in preaching? How do you feel it prepared you for your congregation?
4. What factors aid or hinder your message? Be as specific as you can in your examples.
5. What do you see when you look at the congregation?
6. From your experience, what makes an effective sermon?
7. What are your thoughts about the environment in which the preaching takes place?
8. What do you do for ongoing formation as a preacher? Where do you turn for input/feedback?
9. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think I should know about your experience delivering sermons?

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions Guide

1. What is your response to today's sermon?
2. What about today's sermon affected you? How did you feel about it? How did it prompt you?
3. What kinds of sermons seem to get to you? Why?
4. What elements affect your ability to hear the sermon?
5. How would you describe the relationship between your view of the pastor and the way his or her sermons affect you?
6. Describe an effective sermon for us.
7. How does what you just shared, in answering the previous questions, relate to today's experience in church?
8. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think I should know about your experience with your pastor's sermon?

Appendix J: Relationship between Questions Matrix

Research Questions	Focus Group Questions	Interview Questions
1: In the experience of churchgoing adults, how do the principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching make a difference in the effectiveness of sermons?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8	
2: What perceptions do preachers have about the effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on the effectiveness of their sermons?		3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
3: How do the views of preachers and churchgoers align on the topic of elements that comprise effective sermons?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Appendix K: Personal Interviews Frequency Chart of Immediacy and Relevance Responses

Concepts that Aid Effective Preaching Responses from Preacher Interviews	Church A	Church B	Church C	Church D	Church E	Total
IMMEDIACY						
1. Relating to the Human Condition		X	X	X	X	4
2. Passionate Delivery		X	X			2
3. Open and Receptive (Friendly)	X	X	X	X	X	5
4. Self-Disclosure						0
5. Inspiring	X		X	X		3
6. Humorous			X			1
7. Proximity	X	X	X	X		4
8. Eye Contact	X	X				2
9. Emotional Connection	X	X	X	X	X	5
10. Novel Words						0
11. Use of Stories	X					1
12. Tone of Words						0
13. Simplicity of Words				X		1
RELEVANCE						
14. Presents a Choice / Challenge	X	X	X	X	X	5
15. Integrity of Preacher	X	X	X	X	X	0
16. Humility of Preacher		X	X	X	X	0
17. Preparedness	X	X	X			3
18. Practical in Nature	X	X	X	X	X	5
19. Future Usefulness		X		X	X	3
20. Brevity						0
21. Focused / Singular Message	X		X	X	X	4
22. Clear Introduction / Conclusion						0
23. Visual Enhancement		X		X		2
24. Practical Outline						0
25. Patient / Forgiving Preacher						0
26. Accuracy						0

Appendix L: Focus Groups Frequency Chart of Immediacy and Relevance Responses

Concepts that Aid Effective Preaching Responses from Focus Groups	Church A	Church B	Church C	Church D	Church E	Total
IMMEDIACY						
1. Relating to the Human Condition	X	X	X	X	X	5
2. Passionate Delivery	X	X	X	X	X	5
3. Open and Receptive (Friendly)	X		X	X	X	4
4. Self-Disclosure		X		X	X	3
5. Inspiring	X	X	X	X	X	5
6. Humorous	X	X		X		3
7. Proximity	X			X		2
8. Eye Contact	X	X				2
9. Emotional Connection	X	X	X	X		4
10. Novel Words		X				1
11. Use of Stories	X	X		X	X	4
12. Tone of Words			X	X		2
13. Simplicity of Words			X	X		2
RELEVANCE						
14. Presents a Choice / Challenge	X	X	X	X	X	5
15. Integrity of Preacher	X	X	X	X	X	5
16. Humility of Preacher		X	X	X	X	4
17. Preparedness	X	X	X	X	X	5
18. Practical in Nature	X	X	X	X	X	5
19. Future Usefulness	X	X	X	X	X	5
20. Brevity	X		X		X	3
21. Focused / Singular Message	X	X		X		3
22. Clear Introduction / Conclusion		X	X	X		3
23. Visual Enhancement		X		X		2
24. Practical Outline		X	X	X		3
25. Patient / Forgiving Preacher	X		X		X	3
26. Accuracy	X	X	X	X		4

Curriculum Vitae

Randall C. DeVille
randall.deville@waldenu.edu

~ SENIOR PASTOR ~

Passionate preacher of the Holy Bible with a desire for transformative learning to take place in the lives of churchgoing adults.

EDUCATION

Ed.D. in Teacher Leadership
Walden University ~ Minneapolis, MN

M.S. in Biblical Studies (2005)
Calvary Theological Seminary ~ Kansas City, MO

B.A. in Pastoral Studies (1982)
Calvary Bible College ~ Kansas City, MO

A. Ministry Experience

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1. Senior Pastor | 20 years |
| <i>Falcon Baptist Church</i>
Falcon, Colorado | |
| <i>Community Baptist Church</i>
Tipton, Missouri | |
| <i>Faith Bible Church</i>
Kansas City, Missouri | |
| 2. Assistant Pastor | 4 years |
| <i>Moss Bluff Bible Church</i>
Lake Charles, Louisiana | |
| 3. Minister of Youth & Families | 3 years |
| <i>Woodson Avenue Bible Church</i>
Overland Park, Kansas | |
| <i>Galmey Church</i>
Wheatland, Missouri | |

4. **Teacher / Coach** 12 years
Blue Ridge Christian School
 Kansas City, Missouri
New Hope Christian School
 Independence, Missouri
Plaza Heights Academy
 Blue Springs, Missouri
Victory Christian Academy
 Falcon, Colorado
5. **Speaker**
ACSI Teachers Conference Seminar Leader “Math with a Purpose”
Awana Olympics – St. Louis
Awana Training Conference Speaker – St. Louis
Awana Varsity Camp – Illinois
Calvary Bible College and Theological Seminary Chapel Speaker
Camp Pearl - Louisiana
Heart of America Bible Camp - Missouri
6. **Coordinator of EXCEL - a degree completion program**
Calvary Bible College
 Kansas City, Missouri
7. **Camp Program Director** 6 years
Camp Pearl
 Reeves, Louisiana
8. **Founder / Speaker**
Marshland Muppets
 Lake Charles, Louisiana
9. **Camp Counselor** 10 years
Camp Pearl
 Reeves, Louisiana

B. Business Experience

1. ***Alpha-Omega Communications***
 Wholesaler
 Tipton, Missouri
2. ***L.E. Distributing***
 Owner / Operator of Bakery distributorship franchise
 Lake Charles, Louisiana

3. *U. S. Toy Company*
Shipping department
Grandview, Missouri
4. *DeVille's Canal Service Station*
Supervisor, Cashier, Car Maintenance
Lake Charles, Louisiana

C. Associations

1. Member of Independent Fundamental Churches of America International
2. Advisory Council for Calvary Bible College 1999-2011
3. Who's Who Among America's Teachers
4. ACSI Accreditation
5. Member of GotQuestions.org board of directors